

Briefly,
ABOUT THE BOOK

And Why Not Every Man? is the story of the fight against slavery from the first recorded petition for freedom by a slave couple in 1661 to William Cullen Bryant's poem, "The Death of Slavery" (1866). The story is told in the words of the participants themselves – the slaves, the freedmen and the white Abolitionists – as recorded in letters, speeches, broadsides, poems, songs, petitions and primary documents. These have been selected from a wealth of material produced during two centuries of the freedom struggle, to show the wide range of forces that were engaged in the various stages of the long fight and in the war that ended chattel slavery. Throughout this selection the independent and militant role of the blacks stands out clearly. The title is taken from the freedom spiritual, "Didn't my Lord Deliver Daniel?" which is the prologue to the book. The well-known American historian and authority on Afro-American history, Herbert Aptheker, selected and edited the text, and contributes the introduction.

AND WHY NOT EVERY MAN?

*Documentary Story
of the Fight Against
Slavery in the U.S.*

Assembled and

Edited by

HERBERT APTHEKER



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DIDN'T MY LORD DELIVER DANIEL?

Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel,
D'liver Daniel, d'liver Daniel,
Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel,
And why not-a every man?

He delivered Daniel from the lion's den,
Jonah from the belly of the whale,
And the Hebrew children from the fiery furnace,
And why not every man?

Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel,
D'liver Daniel, d'liver Daniel,
Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel,
And why not-a every man?

The moon run down in a purple-stream,
The sun forbear to shine,
And every star did disappear,
King Jesus shall-a be mine.

Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel,
D'liver Daniel, d'liver Daniel,
Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel,
And why not-a every man?

I set my foot on the Gospel ship,
And the ship it begin to sail,
It landed me over on Canaan's shore,
And I'll never come back any more.

Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel,
D'liver Daniel, d'liver Daniel,
Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel,
And why not-a every man?

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Introduction

History knows no coincidence. Simultaneous events usually have common causes; before one development has finished, it sets in motion another; everything is interdependent.

Today's dramatic rise of the peoples of Africa, nations springing into being where colonies once were, states taking form in birth-pain and struggle, finds its corollary on the other side of the globe in the Negro Americans' fight for their rights as citizens. For each African striking a blow for independence, a heart in America pulses more quickly; for each Negro American conquering a seat at a white lunch counter or a school bench in a kindergarten, a man in Africa straightens his back.

The roots of the problem in both hemispheres are the same. They lie in a common shade of skin, in a common struggle for a freedom from slavery which has been granted on paper but denied in actuality. It is the struggle which has been handed down from the African people who were chained, herded into the hold of slave ships, sold on the auction blocks of New Orleans, to the men and women shackled to the diamond fields of South Africa or the cotton fields of Mississippi, relegated to unspeakable African villages or to the tenements of Harlem, New York or Washington, D.C. For each man mutilated by the

Force Publique of the Belgian King Leopold and his followers, there has been a man lynched by a white Southern posse. For each drum beaten in protest in Kenya, there is a Spiritual of protest hummed in South Carolina.

In the history of the United States there is no more dramatic and illuminating feature than the struggle for Negro freedom. The white conquerors who came upon the fabulous resources of the New World, especially its Northern half, were faced with the great problem of how to exploit them. Their own hands were insufficient. And the indigenous population? It is estimated that when the white man first attempted its settlement, what is today called the United States held no more than a million Indians – a handful of men, women and children when one considers the vast territory (3000 miles in width, 1500 miles in length) over which they were spread. Their nomadic existence, their limited numbers, their dispersion ruled them out as a source for the labor power needed for the profitable production of commodities.

But concurrent with the discovery and opening up of the New World came the European re-discovery of Africa. Here lived a teeming population in a highly developed state of civilization – unlike the nomadic North American Indian, the West African was a settled agriculturist.

It was a situation made to order for the bourgeoisie: In Africa, concentrated labor power. In America, untold resources. Between the two might be built up a marvelously profitable business – the slave trade – whereby additional billions could be made by hauling the labor power from one side of the world to the other. It eliminated a second acute problem: The abundance of free or extremely cheap land in the New World made it difficult to hold “free” labor to the necessary tasks. A system of enforced labor, inherited and permanent and costing no more than the barest subsistence became an “ideal” solution for the bourgeoisie. . . .

The slave trade was blessed and legalized and, second only to war, became capitalism's most lucrative business.

And the slaves in North America (as in South America where, however, they were African to a lesser degree) produced indigo, rice, tobacco, cotton, sugar, lumber, resin, coal, gold, hemp, for sale on the World Market.

The slave trade brought the enormous profits so important to the development of merchant capitalism and to its accumulation of fluid capital wherewith to begin building an industrial capitalism. A second colossal source of profit was the three-hundred-year use of slave labor for the production of the foregoing commodities. Add the two and one may justifiably say that the African crucifixion and the enslavement of African-derived peoples in America were of decisive consequence for the whole world system of capitalism and particularly for the founding and development of capitalism in the United States.

One must see the organic connection between the institution of slavery and the whole private-property based system of exploitation that developed in America to understand the tenacity with which the system of slavery was defended. One must see this connection to understand why the slave-owning class in the United States, certainly during the first four or five decades of the nineteenth century, constituted the ruling class in the nation. By its ownership of four million slaves (the total in 1860) this class — numbering about 225 000 people at most — possessed about four billion dollars worth of property. This class also owned millions of acres of the best land in the country, representing additional billions of dollars; and the millions of tons of cotton and rice and tobacco and sugar, etc., produced by the slaves' labor on those lands, totaled additional billions each year. The whole economy of a relatively homogeneous area constituting one third of the entire United States was absolutely dominated by slavery; and many propertied owners outside its confines — especially merchants, credit houses and

banks in New York and in Great Britain – had huge stakes in the viability of that slave economy.

Certainly, in the United States of the era from 1800 to 1850, no other single class possessed wealth and interests as powerful as those of the slave-owning class. So it was that this class ruled the country – not without opposition, but it ruled! Both political parties, Whig and Democratic, were dominated by it. The Congress of the United States yielded to its will; so did the Presidency which, more often than not, was occupied by a slave-owner. The Courts responded to that same will, and usually had a majority of slave-owners. It follows that the foreign and domestic policy of the United States favored the slave-owning class and respected that class's wishes. The country's dominant ideology and culture reflected the ruling class's values and desires. Almost all newspapers, colleges, pulpits, texts, were pervaded by racism and assumed, at least, the propriety or the necessity of Negro enslavement.

This is a starting point for understanding the great Abolitionist movement in the United States. The movement was revolutionary; it was not, as most literature portrays it, a reformist, or liberal movement. No, it was a movement which sought the overthrow of the ruling class; which challenged the power of the ruling class at its heart, namely, at its property relationships. That ruling class was based upon and defined by its ownership of slaves; the Abolitionist movement demanded the immediate and uncompensated emancipation of those slaves. The Abolitionist movement struck at the root of the power and the nature of property relationships so far as they defined the then existing ruling class. This is the essence of a revolutionary movement.

Only with this in mind can one begin to understand the intense hatred, vilification, persecution and torment that the Abolitionists faced. They were called "foreign agents" – supposedly in the pay of England's Queen

Victoria who sought to weaken the rising Republic through their machinations! Their meetings were attacked, their halls burned, their leaders jailed and beaten, their publications harassed. Simultaneously, every available means of persuasion and communication was loosed to "prove" the inferiority – if not the inhumanity – of the Negro; to show that slavery was necessary and just and proper and sanctified by the Bible; to "prove" that it was impossible to free the Negroes because what would they do, or who would "care" for them, or how would they be "absorbed" by the country? To demonstrate, in any case, that the slave system was benign; it wasn't slavery at all (shades of *People's Capitalism!*) – it was a "domestic institution," a "peculiar institution," a "patriarchal institution" – any name would do that "proved" slavery to be anything but slavery. And mixed with all this, on a somewhat more sophisticated level, the argument was developed that slavery – whatever you called it – was the only possible condition for the poor. The poor were poor because they were no good; and the rich, being good, were the only safe repository of culture and decency. Once the relationship of superior and inferior was attacked, chaos would descend and all the propertied – not only the slave-owners – would be faced with annihilation. The logical outcome of this inverted class-struggle argument was an attack upon all democratic theory, and particularly a repudiation of the Declaration of Independence, which now was adjudged a conglomeration of "glittering generalities" meant to mislead fools, but not to guide men of the world, men of intelligence.

The great fight for Negro freedom from slavery, then, was a basic part of the whole struggle of mankind for liberation from the rule of the few over the many. It was a stirring part of the world-wide effort to implement the sovereignty of the people, the great mass of the people, in every sphere of their lives – economic, political, cultural, social.

Central to the development of the fight against slavery was the Negro people. The first slaves were the first Abolitionists; it was they who fought longest and most bitterly and most directly. They rebelled and fled; they sabotaged and burned; they assassinated and poisoned; they feigned illness and slowed down their work; they fought like lions for their dignity and their freedom. And they led in the formation of the Underground Railroad, and in the creation of an anti-slavery press, and in the formation of a national anti-slavery movement of principle and passion and endurance.

It is a great fact in American history that the Negro people found white allies. Those allies came in the main from among the poor, and throughout the history of the Abolitionist movement, the rich in it could be counted on the fingers of two hands. No, it was the "plain" man and woman, the artisan and mechanic, the factory worker, the yeoman and small farmer, the poor housewife who formed the bulk of the membership of the Abolitionist societies; who constituted the great audiences that filled the anti-slavery conventions, despite intimidation; who contributed the largest part of the pennies and dollars with which the Abolitionist movement printed and distributed the pamphlets and petitions and papers appealing for justice and condemning oppression.

The motivations of the Negro masses are plain; deprived of freedom, they fought for it; treated as beasts, they battled to affirm their human dignity. The motivations of the white allies are less obvious, but no less real. Many were motivated by deep religious conviction, and saw the teachings of Moses and of Jesus daily violated in the horror of slavery; many were motivated by a profound belief in basic democratic values and saw the teachings of Jefferson and the words of his Declaration of Independence spat upon by slavery; many were impelled by a simple feeling of common humanity, and had their imaginations affronted when they thought of what fellow

men and women were suffering daily from the torments of enslavement.

Moreover, the institution of slavery was not quiescent; nothing stands still and least of all a challenged social order. American Negro slavery found it necessary to expand in order to meet the police problems represented by a mounting slave population; if it were to resolve the problem of a falling rate of profit as the soil given to slave cultivation became worn out. Furthermore, the market for slave-grown produce seemed endless – especially as the industrial revolution came to Western Europe. Expansion was needed if that demand was to be met. But expansion brought the system into head-on collision with the non-slave-labor economy of the North; with the farmers and workers, and with the growing industrial bourgeoisie – who wanted the federal lands for themselves and their own use and growth.

The expansionism of the slave system directly involved foreign policy. It led to war with Mexico; to the announcement that Spain had better give up Cuba, "or else"; and to naval expeditions as far distant as the Amazon Valley in Brazil to discover if that area might not well be added to the U.S. based slave empire. War, as against Mexico – or the threat of wars, as against England and Spain – faced men and women of the North with the need to decide whether or not they wanted to fight in such wars, and how well such a foreign policy would serve the interests of the country.

This system of Negro slavery, if it were to maintain itself, had to vitiate the freedom of the white man. For it was a system that had to put down by force the threats of the slaves themselves. It was a system in which no one might with impunity challenge the justness of the order. A drastic fugitive slave law was needed which required all whites to assist in recapturing fugitives from slavery. The mails had to be interfered with when "fanatics" took it upon themselves to use the mails for the distribution of

literature attacking slavery. Freedom of petition had to be nullified when people "abused" it by petitioning Congress for an end to slavery or the slave-trade. Freedom of speech and of press had to be circumscribed when people spoke or wrote in opposition to slavery. In a word, it became more and more necessary to the slave-owners that every citizen show himself not as neutral between slavery and freedom, but as positively partisan on the side of slavery.

On the other hand, the mercantile and industrial and agricultural systems based upon wage labor or self-employment – the classical system of developing capitalism – had not been at a standstill. On the contrary, classical capitalism in the free areas of the United States experienced an accelerated development, favored as it was by enormous expanse, by tremendous resources, by a relatively advanced political form, by distance from Europe's wars and by the rapid growth of population induced by the migrations of millions from strife-torn Europe. But the masters of this development found themselves hampered and restricted by a slavery dominated State whose policies not only did not support them, but positively sided with the interests and needs of slavery. For example, a protective tariff to assist the young U.S. industries to gain undisputed mastery of their own national market was opposed by the raw-material producing and factory-product consuming planters. These same planters opposed active federal assistance – especially through money – for the building of a great transcontinental system of transportation and communication by which to tie together the national market as well as to bring in millions of additional settlers. The same interests opposed any forward-looking money or banking or credit or trading legislation. Again, the rapid opening up of the great West to the settlement of millions of smaller and independent farmers (thus enormously expanding the market) was opposed by the Southern planters. They wanted the

land reserved for themselves, if anyone was to use it. They did not want their political dominance in Congress to be challenged by the growth of free-labor-based and highly populated new states.

This socio-economic transformation, which brought farmers and workers and industrial capitalists in opposition to the continued rule of the slave-owners, tended to create new political organizations and to bring forward new and meaningful political contests. It tended, also, in less direct ways, to sap the strength of the planters. Until now, the slave-owners had always met with particular support from the Northern merchants, who had hauled their crops and managed their marketing problems and often secured them the loans they needed. But as the agricultural economy of the North and the new West grew, as the factories multiplied in Pennsylvania, New York, New England and the Great Lakes region, more and more of the merchants gave up shipping cotton and sugar and took over the shipment of corn and wheat and finished goods. The merchants split up into factions, thus splitting the old Parties, killing the Whigs and dividing the Democrats, creating the Free Soil Party, and then the Republican.

The interests of the Western farmers diverged steadily from those of the planters. Their economies became more and more tied to the East, following the lines of the newly constructed railroads and the development of great markets in the cities of the North and in Europe. This ended the dream of some of the more far-visioned slave-owners – John C. Calhoun of South Carolina, for example – of an alliance between the slave-owners of the South and the farmers of the free areas against the industrialists of the North.

Thus the pioneer, radical Abolitionist movement grew because of the leadership and fight of its members, because it was in the mainstream of the best of American tradition and ideology, because it represented the most

profound need of the millions of Negro men and women. It grew, too, as the country as a whole went through the socio-economic transformation we have sketched, and as the opposition to the slave-owners domination became increasingly common. To develop an Abolitionist movement in a country which more and more resented Bourbon domination was a quite different struggle from the attempt to originate such a movement in a country so dominated. By the late 1840's, the Abolitionist movement had become a bona fide mass movement wielding decisive influence in the country, politically and ideologically.

The Abolitionist movement, as any revolutionary movement, suffered from its share of renegacy, opportunism, sectarianism, splits and betrayals. But a description of these problems is beyond the scope of this book and of this introduction. Moreover, in the long view of history the defections – which appeared so momentous to their contemporaries – fade into relative insignificance. The great fact is that the Abolitionist movement spearheaded successfully the greatest revolutionary struggle thus far carried out in the United States, the struggle founding the country only excepted.

It is worthy of note, however, that this movement gave impetus and even birth to other great democratic and popular struggles. This is especially true of the battle for women's rights; for just as it is true that women were of decisive importance in carrying forward Abolitionism, so it is true that in doing so they developed a movement for their own equality. It is also a fact that while racism penetrated deeply into the national consciousness and infected even the working class, the basic interests forging unity between the working class and the Negro masses evidenced themselves even in the days of slavery. In this connection, it is of great interest that the young Marxist movement, taking roots in the United States by the 1850's, actively participated in the struggle against slav-

ery, just as Marx personally did so, especially through his writings in the very influential *New York Tribune*.

Lastly, the Abolitionist movement in the United States was part of a world-wide movement against the enslavement of the African peoples. Hence, this revolutionary movement had its international aspects and ties. There were common conventions, frequent consultations, and important expressions of international solidarity.

As the question of Negro slavery was of decisive consequence for nineteenth century United States, so the existence of the special oppression of the nineteen million Negro people today in the United States is of decisive consequence. The elimination of chattel slavery did not bring with it the real freedom of the Negro masses, nor did it bring about even that degree of freedom characteristic of bourgeois society at its most developed point. Rather, the system of slavery and racism was replaced by a system of Jim Crow and chauvinism. The bourgeoisie, gaining control of the State, usurping much of the wealth of the South, and desiring the enormous super-profits to be made out of the special exploitation of the Negro people, have maintained and intensified that exploitation.

But, as in the nineteenth century, so in the twentieth, the struggle for Negro freedom constitutes one of the basic progressive forces in American life. Even more than earlier, it merges with all the democratic and progressive struggles of the American people as a whole, and of the American working class above all. It has also the special quality of a struggle against racism and the struggle of an oppressed people for full dignity; in this aspect the struggle of the Negro people in the United States merges with the great national-liberation and anti-colonial movements now shaking the pillars of the "free world."

The work that follows is an effort to illuminate, largely through contemporary documents, the whole battle in the United States against Negro slavery. It is only one possi-

ble collection of such documents; one could easily put together another or several more of equal size wherein all the documents would be quite different from those that follow.

But in this collection, the editor has sought to illustrate the various phases and stages of the movement; to bring forward many of its striking personalities; to illuminate its actual nature; and to do justice to its high drama and intense excitement. The fight for Negro freedom has been anything but dull; if the editor has come near doing justice to that struggle, the pages that follow should at least have the virtue of exciting reading.

Sources for the documents are indicated either in the editor's foreword or in a footnote. Where this is not stated directly, as in a Congressman's speech or a statesman's letter or diary entry, the obvious source is the *Congressional Globe*, or the collected writings of the person involved. Some remaining documents from Negro participants bear no source citation; such documents are taken from the editor's *Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States* (N.Y. 1951). Since this collection is available, extracts from it have been kept to a minimum in the present work. In some cases, where readability would have been seriously impaired, language has been modernized; in many cases, punctuation, paragraphing and orthography in accordance with modern taste have been introduced; in all cases, the word Negro is spelled with an upper-case N. in accordance with correct usage, whether this practice was or was not followed in the original document. Otherwise, all of the documents are printed as they appeared in the original.

HERBERT APTHEKER

New York City
October, 1960

Authors Preface to the 1970 Edition

As the decade of the 1960s terminates, one is led to emphasize certain aspects of the historic movement to end chattel slavery in the United States.

(1) It was, in fact, a movement reflecting Black-White unity – not without difficulties, divisions, and near-despair, but, despite all, substantial unity was achieved and was decisive for success.

(2) It was a revolutionary, not a reformist, movement; that is, it sought a fundamental structural change in U.S. society, attacked significant property relationships, and challenged predominant political power.

(3) The Negro pioneered the movement, maintained its integrity, and inspired its content.

(4) The movement involved moral suasion, political struggle, and militant resistance. Pacifistic and anarchistic influences were present, but the movement as such rejected both. The sectarianism these influences reflected became an increasingly heavy albatross about the neck of the movement; their defeat by the end of the 1840s made possible acquisition of a mass following, helping make anti-slavery the decisive issue of the 1850s.

(5) At stake in the movement to abolish slavery was, also, the survival of the United States of America. Secession's defeat secured the Republic's integrity and re-

quired an end to slavery. Thus – with the irony characterizing history – was demonstrated the fact that the fate of the nation, grown rich on slavery, depended upon terminating slavery. A century later, the fate of the nation permeated by racism depends upon terminating racism. Let it be accomplished – hopefully, at less cost in blood than a century ago – but, *let it be accomplished!*

HERBERT APTHEKER

February, 1969

"To Be a Free Person"

(1661)

It is fitting that a record of the struggle for Negro freedom begins with the effort of a Negro couple to assure the freedom of their adopted son. Such is the earliest petition known to survive from the hands of Negroes in what is today the United States. It is dated 1661, was written in Dutch, and was addressed to the authorities of the colony of New Netherlands (later New York). Its prayer was granted.

To the Noble Right Honorable Director-General
and Lords Councillors of New Netherlands

Herewith very respectfully declare Emanuel Pieterse, a free Negro, and Reytory, otherwise Dorothy, Angola, free Negro woman, together husband and wife, the very humble petitioners of your noble honors, that she, Reytory, in the year 1643, on the third of August, stood as godparent or witness at the Christian baptism of a little son of one Anthony van Angola, begotten with his own wife named Louise, the which aforesaid Anthony and Louise were both free Negroes; and about four weeks thereafter the aforementioned Louise came to depart this world, leaving behind the aforementioned little son named Anthony, the which child your petitioner out of Christian affection took to herself, and with the fruits of her hands' bitter toil she reared him as her own child, and up to the present supported him, taking all motherly solicitude and care for him, without aid of anyone in the world, not even his father (who likewise died about five years thereafter), to solicit his nourishment; and also your petitioner [i.e., Emanuel] since he was married to Reytory, has done his duty and his very best for the rearing ... to assist ... your petitioners very respectfully address themselves to you, noble and right honorable lords, humbly begging that your noble honors consent to grant a

stamp in this margin of this [document] or otherwise a document containing the consent and approval of the above-mentioned adoption and nurturing, on the part of your petitioner, in behalf of the aforementioned Anthony with the intent [of declaring] that he himself, being of free parents, reared and brought up without burden or expense of the [West Indian] Company, or anyone else than your petitioner, in accordance therewith he may be declared by your noble honors to be a free person: this being done, [document] was signed with the mark of Anthony Pieterse.

The First Collective Anti-Slavery Protest

(1668)

On February 18 1688, four Quakers – Garret Hendrich, Derick op de Graeff, Francis Daniel Pastorius, and Abram op de Graeff – submitted to their own Meeting, in Germantown, Pennsylvania, the first collective anti-slavery statement in the history of the American colonies. The protest was outspoken and contained many of the main arguments which were to be stated and re-stated in the ensuing one hundred and seventy-five years of struggle. This protest reached the Quarterly Meeting at Philadelphia, which promptly passed it along to the Yearly Meeting at Burlington, New Jersey. There, "It was adjudged not to be so proper for this Meeting to give a positive judgment in the case, it having so general a relation to many other parts, and therefore at present they forbear it."

The document follows in full.

These are the reasons why we are against the traffic of men-body, as followeth: Is there any that would be done or handled at this manner? viz., to be sold or made a slave for all the time of his life? How fearful and faint-

hearted are many at sea, when they see a strange vessel, being afraid it should be a Turk, and they should be taken, and sold for slaves into Turkey. Now, what is *this* better done, than Turks do? Yea, rather it is worse for them, which say they are Christians; for we hear that the most part of such negers are brought hither against their will and consent and that many of them are stolen. Now, though they are black, we cannot conceive there is more liberty to have them slaves, as it is to have other white ones.

There is a saying, that we should do to all men like as we will be done ourselves; making no difference of what generation, descent, or color they are. And those who steal or rob men, and those who buy or purchase them, are they not all alike? Here is liberty of conscience, which is right and reasonable; here ought to be likewise liberty of the body, except of evildoers, which is another case. But to bring men hither, or to rob and sell them against their will, we stand against.

In Europe there are many oppressed for conscience-sake; and here there are those oppressed which are of a black color. And we who know that men must not commit adultery – some do commit adultery *in* others, separating wives from their husbands, and giving them to others: and some sell the children of these poor creatures to other men. Ah! do consider well this thing, you who do it, if you would be done at this manner – and if it is done according to Christianity! You surpass Holland and Germany in this thing. This makes an ill report in all those countries of Europe, where they hear of [it] that the Quakers do here handle men as they handle there the cattle. And for that reason some have no mind or inclination to come hither.

And who shall maintain this your cause, or plead for it? Truly, we cannot do so, except you shall inform us better hereof, *viz.*, that Christians have liberty to practice these things. Pray, what thing in the world can be done

worse towards us, than if men should rob or steal us away, and sell us for slaves to strange countries; separating husbands from their wives and children. Being now this is not done in the manner we would be done at; therefore, we contradict, and are against this traffic of men-body.

And we who profess that it is not lawful to steal, must, likewise, avoid to purchase such things as are stolen, but rather help to stop this robbing and stealing, if possible. And such men ought to be delivered out of the hands of the robbers, and set free as in Europe. Then is Pennsylvania to have a good report, instead, it hath now a bad one, for this sake, in other countries; especially whereas the Europeans are desirous to know in what manner *the Quakers* do rule in *their* province; and most of them do look upon us with an envious eye. But if this is done well, what shall we say is done evil?

If once these slaves (which they say are so wicked and stubborn men) should join themselves – fight for their freedom, and handle their masters and mistresses, as they did handle them before; will these masters and mistresses take the sword at hand and war against these poor slaves, like, as we are able to believe, some will not refuse to do? Or, have these poor negers not as much right to fight for their freedom, as you have to keep them slaves?

Now consider well this thing, if it is good or bad. And in case you find it to be good to handle these blacks in that manner, we desire and require you hereby lovingly, that you may inform us herein, which at this time never was done, *viz.*, that Christians have such a liberty to do so. To the end we shall be satisfied on this point, and satisfy likewise our good friends and acquaintances in our native country, to whom it is a terror, or fearful thing, that men should be handled so in Pennsylvania.

"Liberty Is Next unto Life"

(1700)

One of the first protests against slavery to be published in the New World took the form of a printed sheet entitled The Selling of Joseph. It was issued in Boston in 1700 and came from the pen of Samuel Sewall (1652-1730). Sewall, brought across the Atlantic at the age of nine, graduated from Harvard and tutored there briefly. Marrying into wealth, he became a leading merchant and was then appointed to several judicial posts and served in the colony's legislature. He was one of the judges who condemned some of the Salem witches to death, but was the only one to admit publicly his error and to beg forgiveness. A further indication of his courage was his plea for a relatively enlightened policy towards the Indians. His most momentous pioneering was his attack upon the institution of slavery, which then existed in all the English colonies on the mainland, including Massachusetts. Although published in 1700, much of his argumentation retains sharp relevance for the American scene twenty-six decades later!

Forasmuch as LIBERTY is in real value next unto LIFE: None ought to part with it themselves, or deprive others of it, but upon most mature consideration.

The numerousness of slaves at this day in the province, and the uneasiness of them under their slavery, hath put many upon thinking whether the foundation of it be firmly and well laid, so as to sustain the vast weight that is built upon it. It is most certain that all men, as they are the sons of Adam, are coheirs, and have equal right unto liberty and all other outward comforts of life. GOD hath given the earth (with all its commodities) unto the sons of Adam*. And hath made of one blood, all nations of men, for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath

* In the original broadside, at this point and many other points, references are given to particular biblical sources; these are omitted throughout.

determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation, that they should seek the Lord. Forasmuch, then, as we are of the offspring of God, *etc.*

Now, although the title given by the last Adam doth infinitely better men's estates respecting God and themselves, and grants them a most beneficial and inviolable lease under the broad seal of Heaven, who were before tenants at will, yet through the indulgence of God to our first parents after the Fall, the outward estate of all and every of their children remains the same, as to one another. So that originally, and naturally, there is no such thing as slavery.

Joseph was rightfully no more a slave to his brethren than they were to him; and they had no more authority to sell him than they had to slay him. And if they had nothing to do to sell him, the Ishmaelites bargaining with them, and paying down twenty pieces of silver, could not make a title. Neither could Potiphar have any better interest in him than the Ishmaelites had. For he that shall in this case plead alteration of property seems to have forfeited a great part of his own claim to humanity. There is no proportion between twenty pieces of silver and liberty. The commodity itself is the claimer.

If Arabian gold be imported in any quantities, most are afraid to meddle with it, though they might have it at easy rates; lest if it should have been wrongfully taken from the owners, it should kindle a fire to the consumption of their whole estate. 'Tis pity there should be more caution used in buying a horse, or a little lifeless dust, than there is in purchasing men and women, whenas they are the offspring of God, and their liberty is *auro pretiosior omni**.

And seeing God hath said: *He that stealeth a man and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death*, this Law being of everlasting

* More precious than all gold.

equity, wherein man-stealing is ranked amongst the most atrocious of capital crimes, what louder cry can there be made of that celebrated warning: *Caveat emptor!**

And all things considered it would conduce more to the welfare of the province to have white servants for a term of years than to have slaves for life.** Few can endure to hear of a Negro's being made free; and indeed they can seldom use their freedom well; yet their continual aspiring after their forbidden liberty renders them unwilling servants. And there is such a disparity in their conditions, color, and hair that they can never embody with us, and grow up into orderly families, to the peopling of the land; but still remain in our body politic as a kind of extravasate blood.

As many Negro men as there are among us, so many empty places there are in our train banks, and the places taken up of men that might make husbands for our daughters. And the sons and daughters of New England would become more like Jacob and Rachel if this slavery were thrust quite out of doors. Moreover it is too well known what temptations masters are under to connive at the fornication of their slaves, lest they should be obliged to find them wives or pay their fines. It seems to be practically pleaded that they might be lawless; 'tis thought much of that the law should have satisfaction for their thefts and other immoralities; by which means, *Holiness to the Lord* is more rarely engraven upon this sort of servitude.

It is likewise most lamentable to think how in taking Negroes out of Africa and selling of them here, that which God has joined together, men do boldly asunder;

* Let the buyer beware!

** In all the colonies throughout the seventeenth century, white indentured servitude, for a stated period (usually seven years), was much more common than Negro slavery. White indenture was widespread through most of the eighteenth century, too; it disappeared about ten or twenty years after the Revolution.

men from their country, husbands from their wives, parents from their children. How horrible is the uncleanness, mortality, if not murder that the ships are guilty of that bring crowds of these miserable men and women. Methinks, when we are bemoaning the barbarous usage of our friends and kinsfolk in Africa [captured by Barbary seamen and enslaved in North Africa] it might not be unseasonable to inquire whether we are not culpable in forcing the Africans to become slaves amongst ourselves. And it may be a question whether all the benefit received by Negro slaves will balance the account of cash laid out upon them, and for the redemption of our own enslaved friends out of Africa, besides all the persons and estates that have perished there.

Obj. 1: *These blackamoors are of the posterity of Cham [Ham], and therefore are under the curse of slavery.*

Answer: Of all offices, one would not beg this: *viz.*, uncalled for, to be an executioner of the vindictive wrath of God, the extent and duration of which is to us uncertain. If this ever was a commission, how do we know but that it is long since out of date? Many have found it to their cost that a prophetic denunciation of judgment against a person or people would not warrant them to inflict that evil. If it would, Hazael might justify himself in all he did against his master and the Israelites . . .

But is it possible that by cursory reading, this text may have been mistaken. For Canaan is the person cursed three times over, without the mentioning of Cham. Good expositors suppose the curse entailed on him, and that this prophecy was accomplished in the extirpation of the Canaanites and in the servitude of the Gibeonites. Whereas the blackamoors are not descended of Canaan, but of Cush. *Princes shall come out of Egypt (Misraim); Ethiopia (Cush) shall soon stretch out her hands unto*

God. Under which names all Africa may be comprehended; and their promised conversion ought to be prayed for. *Can the Ethiopian change his skin?* This shows that black men are the posterity of Cush, who time out of mind have been distinguished by their color. And for want of the true, Ovid assigns a fabulous cause of it: *Sanguine tum credunt in corpora summa vocato AEthiopum populos nigrum traxisse colorem.**

Obj. 2: *The Nigers are brought out of a pagan country, into places where the Gospel is preached.*

Answer: Evil must not be done that good may come of it. The extraordinary and comprehensive benefit accruing to the church of God, and to Joseph personally, did not rectify his brethren's sale of him.

Obj. 3: *The Africans have wars one with another; our ships bring lawful captives taken in those wars.*

Answer: For aught is known, their wars are much such as were between Jacob's sons and their brother Joseph. If they be between town and town, provincial, or national, every war is upon one side unjust. An unlawful war can't make lawful captives. And by receiving, we are in danger to promote and partake in their barbarous cruelties. I am sure, if some gentlemen should go down to the Brewsters to take the air, and fish, and a stronger party from Hull should surprise them, and sell them for slaves to a ship outward bound, they would think themselves unjustly dealt with, both by sellers and buyers. And yet 'tis to be feared we have no other kind of title to our Nigers. *Therefore all things whatsoever*

* "It was then, as men think, that the peoples of Ethiopia became black-skinned, since the blood was drawn to the surface of their bodies by the heat." (Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, II, 235-236)

ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.

Obj. 4: *Abraham had servants bought with his money, and born in his house.*

Answer: Until the circumstances of Abraham's purchase be recorded, no argument can be drawn from it. In the mean time charity obliges us to conclude that he knew it was lawful and good.

It is observable that the Israelites were strictly forbidden the buying or selling one another for slaves. And God gaged his blessing in lieu of any loss they might conceit they suffered thereby. And since the partition wall is broken down, inordinate self-love should likewise be demolished. God expects that Christians should be of a more ingenuous and benign frame of spirit. Christians should carry it to all the world, as the Israelites were to carry it one towards another.

And for men obstinately to persist in holding their neighbors and brethren under the rigor of perpetual bondage seems to be no proper way of gaining assurance that God has given them spiritual freedom. Our blessed Savior has altered the measures of the ancient love song and set it to a most excellent new tune, which all ought to be ambitious of learning. These Ethiopians, as black as they are, seeing they are the sons and daughters of the first Adam, the brethren and sisters of the last Adam, and the offspring of God, they ought to be treated with a respect agreeable.

John Woolman on Slavery (1753, 1757)

Perhaps the most influential eighteenth century American Quaker was John Woolman (1720-1772). Born in New Jersey and earning his living as a tailor, Woolman's goodness and piety soon won the love of his neighbors. In 1743 he was recorded a minister by the Burlington, New Jersey, Meeting of his Society. Thereafter his teachings against slavery, war, and other social injustices - enunciated in writings and during many trips throughout the land, the South included - gained a wide following.

Most noted of his writings is his Journal, first published in 1774. Thereafter, this Journal appeared in numerous printings, one edited by Whittier in 1871; another by Amelia Gummere in 1922; and the latest, and most definitive, by Janet Whitney in 1950. The two entries from the Journal printed below - they carry the dates 1753 and 1757 respectively - are from the last edition.

(1753)

About this time a person at some distance lying sick, his brother came to me to write his will. I knew he had slaves, and asking his brother, was told he intended to leave them slaves to his children. As writing is a profitable employ, as offending sober people is disagreeable to me, I was straitened in my mind; but as I looked to the Lord He inclined my heart to His testimony, and I told the man that I believed the practice of continuing slavery to these people was not right, and had a scruple in my mind against doing writings of that kind; that though many in our Society [of Friends] kept them slaves, still I was not easy to be concerned with it, and desired to be excused from going to write the will. I spake to him in fear of the Lord, and he made no reply to what I said but went away; he himself had some concerns in the practice and I thought he was displeased with me. In

this case I had a fresh confirmation that acting contrary to present outward interest from sincere regard to truth and righteousness, and thereby incurring the resentments of people, opens the way to a treasure which is better than silver, and to a friendship exceeding the friendship of men.

(1757)

The prospect of a road lying open to the same degeneracy in some parts of this newly settled land of America in respect to our conduct towards the Negroes hath deeply bowed my mind in this journey*, and though to briefly relate how these people are treated is no agreeable work, yet, after reading over the notes I made as I traveled, I find my mind engaged to preserve them. Many of the white people in those [Southern] provinces take little or no care of Negro marriages; and when Negroes marry after their own way, some make so little account of those marriages that with views of outward interest they often part men from their wives by selling them far asunder, which is common when estates are sold by executors at vendue. Many whose labor is heavy being followed in the field by a man with a whip, hired for that purpose, have in common little else to eat but one peck of Indian corn and some salt, for one week, with a few potatoes; and the latter they commonly raise by their labor on the first day of the week. The correction ensuing on their disobedience to overseers, or slothfulness in business, is often very severe, and sometimes desperate.

Men and women have many times scarce clothes sufficient to hide their nakedness, and boys and girls ten and twelve years old are often stark naked among their

* This entry was made in the midst of Woolman's second journey through the South; its particular locale was Virginia.

master's children. Some of our Society, and some of the Society called Newlights, use some endeavors to instruct those they have in reading; but in common this is not only neglected, but disapproved.

These are a people by whose labor the other inhabitants are in a great measure supported, and many of them in the luxuries of life. These are a people who have made no agreement to serve us, and who have not forfeited their liberty that we know of. These are the souls for whom Christ died, and for our conduct towards them we must answer before that Almighty Being who is no respecter of persons. They who know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent, and are thus acquainted with the merciful, benevolent, Gospel Spirit, will therein perceive that the indignation of God is kindled against oppression and cruelty, and in beholding the great distress of so numerous a people will find cause for mourning.

Benjamin Rush and Slavery (April, 1773)

“... The Sweat and Blood of Negro Slaves ...”

One of the great patriots of eighteenth century America was the eminent physician and pioneer psychiatrist, Benjamin Rush (1745–1813). A member of the revolutionary Continental Congress, for Pennsylvania, surgeon general of the Revolutionary Army, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, Dr. Rush also was one of the founders of the first anti-slavery society in America – that established in Philadelphia in 1775. One of his earliest publications, issued in Philadelphia in 1773, was a pamphlet denouncing slavery; it was reprinted in Boston, New York, and Connecticut.

Published below is a letter Dr. Rush wrote from Philadelphia on April 29 1773 to Jacques Barbeu Dubourg in Paris. Dubourg himself was an outstanding physician, botanist, and

translator and a close friend of Benjamin Franklin. Reference to the earlier pamphlet is made in the letter as well as to the work of Anthony Benezet, of whom more will be said later.*

A request has been presented to our Assembly to place a stronger restraint upon the importation of slaves in this province; and a pamphlet has been publicly circulated, a copy of which Dr. Franklin will transmit to you, which is entitled: *Address to the Inhabitants of the British Colonies upon Slavekeeping*. I am publicly credited with having written this pamphlet at the instigation of a pious Quaker of French origin, Anthony Benezet, whose name is held in veneration in these parts and deserves to be spread throughout the world. This work has produced the desired effect. A law has been passed which levies a tax of from 7 to 14 pounds sterling per head upon Negro slaves; this amounts to an almost total prohibition.

We have cause to hope that the good effects of this little piece will not be confined within the boundaries of this province. It has been reprinted in New York and in Boston, where it has aroused the zeal of a number of ardent and eloquent defenders of justice, liberty, and humanity, all of which are violated by this iniquitous practice of slaveholding . . .

I have refused a thousand guineas a year lately offered to me in Charleston, South Carolina. I am too attached to my own country, this dear province where one owes one's ease only to free and honest toil, to be tempted to exchange it for a country where wealth has been accumulated only by the sweat and blood of Negro slaves . . .

* Source: L. H. Butterfield, ed., *Letters of Benjamin Rush* (2 vols., Princeton, 1951), I, pp. 76-77.

Thomas Paine on Slavery

(1775)

"An Height of Outrage Against Humanity"

Thomas Paine (1737-1809) was born in England, the son of a poor farmer. As a civil-service employee he was twice dismissed from his job because he led efforts to obtain an increase in wages. Paine gained the friendship of Benjamin Franklin while the latter was in London, and came to the American colonies in 1774 with a letter of introduction from him. He threw himself into the developing revolutionary movement in the new country. His Common Sense and The Crisis made him as well known as Washington and Jefferson. His later career, as the friend of the French Revolution, as the deist philosopher and author of The Age of Reason, is well-known.

His first article, written for publication shortly after he landed in the New World, was "African Slavery in America." It was published in a Philadelphia paper on March 8 1775 and probably furthered the founding in April of that year of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society - a Society of which Paine was a charter member. The article follows in full.*

To Americans: That some desperate wretches should be willing to steal and enslave men by violence and murder for gain, is rather lamentable than strange. But that many civilized, nay, Christianized people should approve, and be concerned in the savage practice, is surprising; and still persist, though it has been so often proved contrary to the light of nature, to every principle of justice and humanity, and even good policy, by a succession of eminent men**, and several late publications.

* Source: Philip S. Foner, ed., *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine* (N. Y., 1951, 2 vols.) II, pp. 16-19.

** Dr. Ames, Baxter, Durlam, Locke, Carmichael, Hutcheson, Montesquieu, and Blackstone, Wallace, etc., etc., Bishop of Gloucester. [Paine's own footnote]

Our traders in MEN (*an unnatural commodity!*) must know the wickedness of that SLAVE TRADE, if they attend to reasoning, or the dictates of their own hearts; and such as shun and stifle all these, wilfully sacrifice conscience, and the character of integrity to that golden idol.

The managers of that trade themselves, and others, testify, that many of these African nations inhabit fertile countries, are industrious farmers, enjoy plenty, and lived quietly, averse to war, before the Europeans debauched them with liquors, and bribing them against one another; and that these inoffensive people are brought into slavery, by stealing them, tempting kings to sell subjects, which they can have no right to do, and hiring one tribe to war against another, in order to catch prisoners. By such wicked and inhuman ways the English are said to enslave towards one hundred thousand yearly; of which thirty thousand are supposed to die by barbarous treatment in the first year; besides all that are slain in the unnatural wars excited to take them. So much innocent blood have the managers and supporters of this inhuman trade to answer for to the common Lord of all!

Many of these were not prisoners of war, and redeemed from savage conquerors, as some plead; and they who were such prisoners, the English, who promote the war for that very end, are the guilty authors of their being so; and if they were redeemed, as is alleged, they would owe nothing to the redeemer but what he paid for them.

They show as little reason as conscience who put the matter by with saying – “Men, in some cases, are lawfully made slaves, and why may not these?” So men, in some cases, are lawfully put to death, deprived of their goods, without their consent; may any man, therefore, be treated so, without any conviction of desert? Nor is this plea mended by adding – “They are set forth to us as slaves, and we buy them without farther inquiry, let the sellers see to it.” Such men may as well join with a known band

of robbers, buy their ill-got goods, and help on the trade; ignorance is no more pleadable in one case than the other; the sellers plainly own how they obtain them. But none can lawfully buy without evidence that they are not concurring with men stealers; and as the true owner has a right to reclaim his goods that were stolen, and sold; so the slave, who is proper owner of his freedom, has a right to reclaim it, however often sold.

Most shocking of all is alleging the sacred scriptures to favor this wicked practice. One would have thought none but infidel cavillers would endeavor to make them appear contrary to the plain dictates of natural light, and conscience, in a matter of common justice and humanity; which they cannot be. Such worthy men, as referred to before, judged otherways; Mr. Baxter* declared, *the slave traders should be called devils, rather than Christians; and that it is a heinous crime to buy them.* But some say, "the practice was permitted to the Jews." To which may be replied:

1. The example of the Jews, in many things, may not be imitated by us; they had not only orders to cut off several nations altogether, but if they were obliged to war with others, and conquered them, to cut off every male; they were suffered to use polygamy and divorces, and other things utterly unlawful to us under clearer light.

2. The plea is, in a great measure, false; they had no permission to catch and enslave people who never injured them.

3. Such arguments ill become us, *since the time of reformation came*, under gospel light. All distinctions of

* Richard Baxter (1615-1691), English clergyman, supporter of Cromwell, leading dissenter, jailed for eighteen months by the notorious Judge Jeffreys.

nations, and privileges of one above others, are ceased; Christians are taught to *account all men their neighbors; and love their neighbors as themselves; and do to all men as they would be done by; to do good to all men; and man stealing is ranked with enormous crimes.*

Is the barbarous enslaving our inoffensive neighbors, and treating them like wild beasts subdued by force, reconcilable with all these *divine precepts*? Is this doing to them as we would desire they should do to us? If they could carry off and enslave some thousands of us, would we think it just? One would almost wish they could for once; it might convince more than reason, or the Bible.

As much in vain, perhaps, will they search ancient history for examples of the modern slave trade. Too many nations enslaved the prisoners they took in war. But to go to nations with whom there is no war, who have no way provoked, without farther design of conquest, purely to catch inoffensive people, like wild beasts, for slaves, is an height of outrage against humanity and justice, that seems left by heathen nations to be practiced by pretended Christians. How shameful are all attempts to color and excuse it!

As these people are not convicted of forfeiting freedom, they have still a natural, perfect right to it; the governments whenever they come should, in justice set them free, and punish those who hold them in slavery.

So monstrous is the making and keeping them slaves at all, abstracted from the barbarous usage they suffer, and the many evils attending the practice; as selling husbands away from wives, children from parents, and from each other, in violation of sacred and natural ties; and opening the way for adulteries, incests, and many shocking consequences, for all of which the guilty masters must answer to the final Judge.

If the slavery of parents be unjust, much more is their children's; if the parents were justly slaves, yet the

children are born free; this is the natural, perfect right of all mankind; they are nothing but a just recompense to those who bring them up: And as much less is commonly spent on them than others, they have a right, in justice, to be proportionably sooner free.

Certainly one may, with as much reason and decency, plead for murder, robbery, lewdness and barbarity, as for this practice. They are not more contrary to the natural dictates of conscience, and feelings of humanity; nay, they are all comprehended in it. But the chief design of this paper is not to disprove it, which many have sufficiently done; but to entreat Americans to consider.

1. With what consistency, or decency they complain so loudly of attempts to enslave them, while they hold so many hundred thousands in slavery; and annually enslave many thousands more, without any pretence of authority, or claim upon them?

2. How just, how suitable to our crime is the punishment with which providence threatens us? We have enslaved multitudes, and shed much innocent blood in doing it; and now are threatened with the same. And while other evils are confessed, and bewailed, why not this especially, and publicly; than which no other vice, if all others, has brought so much guilt on the land?

3. Whether, then, all ought not immediately to discontinue and renounce it, with grief and abhorrence? Should not every society bear testimony against it, and account obstinate persisters in it bad men, enemies to their country, and exclude them from fellowship; as they often do for much lesser faults?

4. The great question may be – What should be done with those who are enslaved already? To turn the old and infirm free, would be injustice and cruelty; they who

enjoyed the labors of their better days should keep, and treat them humanely. As to the rest, let prudent men, with the assistance of legislatures, determine what is practicable for masters and best for them. Perhaps some could give them lands upon reasonable rent, some, employing them in their labor still, might give them some reasonable allowances for it; so as all may have some property, and fruits of their labors at their own disposal, and be encouraged to industry; the family may live together, and enjoy the natural satisfaction of exercising relative affections and duties, with civil protection, and other advantages, like fellow men. Perhaps they might sometime form useful barrier settlements on the frontiers. Thus they may become interested in the public welfare, and assist in promoting it; instead of being dangerous, as now they are, should any enemy promise them a better condition.

5. The past treatment of Africans must naturally fill them with abhorrence of Christians; lead them to think our religion would make them more inhuman savages, if they embraced it; thus the gain of that trade has been pursued in opposition to the Redeemer's cause, and the happiness of men. Are we not, therefore, bound in duty to him and to them to repair these injuries, as far as possible, by taking some proper measures to instruct, not only the slaves here, but the Africans in their own countries? Primitive Christians labored always to spread their *divine religion*; and this is equally our duty while there is an heathen nation. But what singular obligations are we under to these injured people!

Petitioning Revolutionists to End Slavery

(1777)

The ferment preceding and accompanying the Revolutionary War stimulated many Negro people, collectively and individually, to make public pleas against slavery and to point out to the less than two and a half million American white people the incongruity and danger of shouting "Liberty or Death" while enslaving about 650 000 human beings. Printed below is one of many such petitions. This one, presented by Negroes living in Boston to the Legislature of Massachusetts, is dated January 13 1777 having been written in the high tide of the battles against the British Crown.

The petition of A Great Number of Blacks detained in a State of slavery in the Bowels of a free & Christian Country Humbly sheweth that your Petitioners apprehend that they have in Common with all other men a Natural and Unaliable Right to that freedom which the Great Parent of the Unavers hath Bestowed equalley on all menkind and which they have never forfeited by any Compact or agreement whatever – but that wher Unjustly Dragged by the hand of cruel Power from their Derest friends and sum of them even torn from the embraces of their tender Parents – from a Populous Pleasant and plentiful country and in violation of Laws of Nature and of Nations and in defiance of all the tender feelings of humanity Brought here either to be Sold like Beast of Burthen & like them condemned to Slavery for life – Among a People profesing the mild Religion of Jesus A people not insensible of the Secrets of rational being nor without spirit to resent the unjust endeavors of others to reduce them to a state of Bondage and Subjection your honor need not be informed that a life of Slavery like that of your petitioners deprived of every social privilege of

every thing requisite to render Life tolerable is far worse than nonexistence.

In imitation of the laudable Example of the good People of these States your petitioners have long and patiently waited the event of petition after petition by them presented to the legislative Body of this state and cannot but with grief reflect that their success hath been but too similar they cannot but express their Astonishment that it hath never Bin considered that every principle from which Amarica has acted in the course of their unhappy difficulties with Great Briton pleads stronger than a thousand arguments in favor of your petitioners they therfore humble beseech your honors to give this petition its due weight & consideration & cause an act of the Legislatur to be past Wherby they may be restored to the enjoyments of that which is the Naturel Right of all men – and their children who were born in this Land of Liberty may not be held as Slaves after they arive at the age of twenty one years so may the Inhabitance of this States no longer chargeable with the incosistency of acting themselves the part which they condem and oppose in others Be prospered in their present Glorious Struggle for Liberty and have those Blessing to them.

Thomas Jefferson on Slavery (1781) “I Tremble For My Country”

The great apostle of democratic theory is Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826), third President of the United States, and author of the Declaration of Independence. Reflecting the limitations of bourgeois democracy – even in its finest and most militant phase – is the fact that its revolutionary incarnation was himself a Virginia planter and slave-owner. It is nevertheless true that Jefferson despised the institution of slavery and that he struck

several blows against it throughout his long and distinguished career. He also wrote of it in terms of the greatest hostility. Nowhere, for example, will one find a more devastating critique of Negro slavery than in his Notes on Virginia. Sections of the paragraphs which follow supplied quotes to those in the ensuing decades who sought the end of slavery.

There must be an unhappy influence on the manners of our people produced by the existence of slavery among us. The whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submissions on the other . . . Our children see this, and learn to imitate it . . . The parent storms, the child looks on, catches the lineaments of wrath, puts on the same airs and in the circle of smaller slaves, gives a loose to the worst of passions, and thus nursed, educated, and daily exercised in tyranny, cannot but be stamped by it with odious peculiarities . . .

And can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are of the gift of God? That they are not to be violated but with His wrath? Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just; that His justice cannot sleep forever; that considering numbers, nature and natural means only, a revolution of the wheel of fortune, an exchange of situation is among possible events; that it may become probable by supernatural interference!

The Almighty has no attribute which can take side with us in such a contest. But it is impossible to be temperate and to pursue this subject through the various considerations of policy, of morals, of history natural and civil. We must be contented to hope they will force their way into everyone's mind. I think a change is already perceptible . . . The spirit of the master is abating, that of the

slave rising from the dust, his condition mollifying, the way I hope preparing under the auspices of heaven, for a total emancipation, and that this is disposed, in the order of events to be with the consent of the masters, rather than by their extirpation.

Anthony Benezet

(1783)

"A Serious Address"

A pioneer and influential battler against Negro enslavement and racism was Anthony Benezet. Born in France in 1713, he moved to England as a youth and there joined the Society of Friends (Quakers). In 1731 he migrated to the New World. Philadelphia remained his home until his death in 1784. He was a teacher; the founder of an early girls' school; founder of a school for Negro children; a protestant against the cruelties practiced towards the Indian peoples; and, above all, a foe of slavery. His writings and speeches against slavery were read and heard by tens of thousands in America and in England. His influence upon Franklin, Rush, Jefferson and others of their stature was considerable. His last work, A Serious Address to the Rulers of America, on the Inconsistency of Their Conduct Respecting Slavery, was published in 1783. Having reference to the "self-evident" truths enunciated in Jefferson's Declaration of Independence, Benezet's essential point in this pamphlet was stated in these words.

If these solemn truths uttered in such an awful crisis, are *self-evident*: unless we can show that the African race are not *men*, words can hardly express the amazement which naturally arises on reflecting that the very people who make these pompous declarations are slaveholders, and, by their legislation, tell us that these blessings were only meant to be the *rights of white men*, not of all *men*; and

would seem to verify the observation of an eminent writer: "When men talk of liberty, they mean their own liberty, and seldom suffer their thoughts on that point to stray to their neighbors."

The Northwest Ordinance

(1787)

The Old Northwest was the area about the Great Lakes, comprising the present States of Wisconsin, Michigan, Illinois, Indiana and Ohio, and part of Minnesota. In the Treaty of Paris (1783) ending the Revolution, it was acknowledged by Great Britain to be part of the United States. During the Confederation Period, the disposal of these lands - claimed by several States - was a major problem. In 1786 practically all of it was finally ceded to the Federal Government, which now was faced with the task of organizing an appropriate form of administration. In this task Jefferson played a major role. The result was the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, providing for the government of the Territory and for the future entry of sections of it as States into the Union. One of the most important and consequential provisions of this Ordinance was its sixth article, which prohibited slavery within it, while providing for the return from it of fugitive slaves. - Article VI, so decisive in future debates on the expansion of slavery into federal territories, follows.

There shall be neither slavery nor involuntary servitude in the said territory, otherwise than in the punishment of crimes whereof the party shall have been duly convicted: *Provided, always* That any person escaping into the same, from whom labor or service is lawfully claimed in any one of the original States, such fugitive may be lawfully reclaimed and conveyed to the person claiming his or her labor or service as aforesaid.

For Equal Educational Facilities (1787)

The eighteenth century saw one of the first Negro efforts to obtain educational rights – a petition from Boston to the State Legislature dated October 17 1787. Its prayer was rejected. The leader behind this petition was Prince Hall, who was born in Barbados in 1748 and came to Massachusetts when seventeen years old. He served in the Revolutionary Army and became a Methodist Minister in Cambridge after the War. Prince Hall was the founder of the Negro Masonic Order in the United States, and an early spokesman against slavery. In 1798, he established a school for Negro children.

The petition of a great number of blacks, freemen of this Commonwealth, humbly sheweth, that your petitioners are held in common with other freemen of this town and Commonwealth and have never been backward in paying our proportionate part of the burdens under which they have, or may labor under; and as we are willing to pay our equal part of these burdens, we are of the humble opinion that we have a right to enjoy the privileges of free men. But that we do not will appear in many instances, and we beg leave to mention one out of many, and that is of the education of our children which now receive no benefit from the free schools in the town of Boston, which we think is a great grievance, as by woeful experience we now feel the want of a common education. We, therefore, must fear for our rising offspring to see them in ignorance in a land of gospel light when there is provision made for them as well as others and yet can't enjoy them, and for not other reason can be given this they are black . . .

We therefore pray your Honors that you would in your wisdom some provision may be made for the education of our dear children. And in duty bound shall ever pray.

Benjamin Franklin

(1790)

Pro-Slavery Parody

In any listing of the half-dozen greatest Americans, the name of Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) would have to be included. The son of a soapmaker, he had almost no formal schooling, but through his own efforts became one of the most cultivated, erudite and scientifically informed men of his century. He was a founder of the American Philosophical Society and of the University of Pennsylvania; inventor of bifocal glasses, of the harmonica, of important improvements in house heating; his writings on economic theory were acute and attracted the admiration, later, of Karl Marx; his investigations of electricity were pioneer accomplishments. In the midst of all these efforts, Franklin carried on his work as a leading editor, publicist and statesman. As a foremost revolutionist he signed both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution; as a principal diplomat, he was most influential in gaining France's support for the new Republic, and in negotiating the Treaty of Paris in 1783 whereby Great Britain recognized the independence of the United States. In addition, Franklin championed many social efforts, from public libraries to the abolition of slavery.

In his capacity as President of the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, he signed a memorial presented to the First Congress, in 1789, asking that it pass legislation discouraging the slave trade. This memorial was rejected by that Congress; in the course of the rejection a Congressman from Georgia, James Jackson, denounced the memorialists and declared himself opposed to any "meddling with the affair of slavery, or attempting to mend the condition of slaves." Mr. Jackson also undertook to defend slavery by appeals to both history and religion.

Only three months prior to his death - in his 84th year - Franklin sent to the editor of the Federal Gazette in Philadelphia one of the last pieces of writings from his pen: a parody defending the practice of Algerian seamen in enslaving - and holding for ransom - the Europeans they captured in battles in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean Sea. Dated March 23 1790, and signed Historicus, this essay follows.

Reading last night in your excellent paper the speech of Mr. Jackson in Congress against their meddling with the affair of slavery, or attempting to mend the condition of the slaves, it put me in mind of a similar one made about one hundred years since by Sidi Mehemet Ibrahim, a member of the Divan of Algiers, which may be seen in Martin's Account of his Consulship, anno 1687. It was against granting the petition of the sect called *Erika*, or Purists, who prayed for the abolition of piracy and slavery as being unjust. Mr. Jackson does not quote it; perhaps he has not seen it. If, therefore, some of its reasonings are to be found in his eloquent speech, it may only show that men's interests and intellects operate and are operated on with surprising similarity in all countries and climates, when under similar circumstances. The African's speech, as translated, is as follows.

"Allab Bismillab, etc. God is great, and Mahomet is his Prophet.

"Have these *Erika* considered the consequences of granting their petition? If we cease our cruises against the Christians, how shall we be furnished with the commodities their countries produce, and which are so necessary for us? If we forbear to make slaves of their people, who in this hot climate are to cultivate our lands? Who are to perform the common labors of our city, and in our families? Must we not then be our own slaves? And is there not more compassion and more favor due to us as Musulmen, than to these Christian dogs?

"We have now above 50 000 slaves in and near Algiers. This number, if not kept up by fresh supplies, will soon diminish, and be gradually annihilated. If we then cease taking and plundering the infidel ships, and making slaves of the seamen and passengers, our lands will become of no value for want of cultivation; the rents of houses in the city will sink one half; and the revenues of

government arising from its share of prizes be totally destroyed! And for what? To gratify the whims of a whimsical sect, who would have us not only forbear making more slaves, but even to manumit those we have.

"But who is to indemnify their masters for the loss? Will the state do it? Is our treasury sufficient? Will the *Erika* do it? Can they do it? Or would they, to do what they think justice to the slaves, do a greater injustice to the owners? And if we set our slaves free, what is to be done with them? Few of them will return to their countries; they know too well the greater hardships they must there be subject to; they will not embrace our holy religion; they will not adopt our manners; our people will not pollute themselves by intermarrying with them. Must we maintain them as beggars in our streets, or suffer our properties to be the prey of their pillage? For men long accustomed to slavery will not work for a livelihood when not compelled. And what is there so pitiable in their present condition? Were they not slaves in their own countries?

"Are not Spain, Portugal, France, and the Italian states governed by despots, who hold their subjects in slavery, without exception? Even England treats its sailors as slaves; for they are, whenever the government pleases, seized and confined in ships of war, condemned not only to work, but to fight, for small wages, or a mere subsistence, not better than our slaves are allowed by us. Is their condition then made worse by their falling into our hands? No; they have only exchanged one slavery for another, and I may say a better; for here they are brought into a land where the sun of Islamism gives forth its light, and shines in full splendor, and they have an opportunity of making themselves acquainted with the true doctrine, and thereby saving their immortal souls. Those who remain at home have not that happiness. Sending the slaves home then would be sending them out of light into darkness.

"I repeat the question: What is to be done with them?

I have heard it suggested that they may be planted in the wilderness, where there is plenty of land for them to subsist on, and where they may flourish as a free state; but they are, I doubt, too little disposed to labor without compulsion, as well as too ignorant to establish a good government, and the wild Arabs would soon molest and destroy or again enslave them. While serving us, we take care to provide them with every thing, and they are treated with humanity. The laborers in their own country are, as I am well informed, worse fed, lodged and clothed. The condition of most of them is therefore already mended, and requires no further improvement. Here their lives are in safety. They are not liable to be impressed for soldiers, and forced to cut one another's Christian throats, as in the wars of their own countries. If some of the religious mad bigots, who now tease us with their silly petitions, have in a fit of blind zeal freed their slaves, it was not generosity, it was not humanity, that moved them to the action; it was from the conscious burden of a load of sins, and hope, from the supposed merits of so good a work, to be excused of damnation.

"How grossly are they mistaken in imagining slavery to be disallowed by the *Alcoran*! Are not the two precepts, to quote no more, *Masters, treat your slaves with kindness; Slaves, serve your masters with cheerfulness and fidelity*, clear proofs to the contrary? Nor can the plundering of infidels be in that sacred book forbidden, since it is well known from it that God has given the world, and all that it contains, to his faithful Mussulmen, who are to enjoy it of right as fast as they conquer it. Let us then hear no more of this detestable proposition, the manumission of Christian slaves, the adoption of which would, by depreciating our lands and houses, and thereby depriving so many good citizens of their properties, create universal discontent, and provoke insurrections, to the endangering of government and producing general confusion. I have therefore no doubt, but this wise council

will prefer the comfort and happiness of a whole nation of true believers to the whim of a few *Erika*, and dismiss their petition."

The result was, as Martin tells us, that the Divan came to this resolution: "The doctrine, that plundering and enslaving the Christians is unjust, is at best *problematical*; but that it is in the interest of this state to continue the practice is clear; therefore let the petition be rejected."

And it was rejected accordingly.

And since like motives are apt to produce in the minds of men like opinions and resolutions, may we not venture to predict from this account, that the petitions to the Parliament of England for abolishing the slave trade, to say nothing of other legislatures, and the debates upon them, will have a similar conclusion . . .

David Rice of Kentucky on Slavery (1792)

"The Greatest Injustice"

Exemplifying a deepening appreciation among many Southern white people of the morally debilitating effect of Negro slavery upon themselves, was the plea against the institution made by the Rev. David Rice in the 1792 Constitutional Convention which marked the beginnings of statehood in Kentucky. Despite the fact that his argument went unheeded in the Convention, its influence became widespread. It appeared that same year in print in a pamphlet published in Philadelphia under the title, Slavery Inconsistent with Justice and Good Policy. The following year, 1793, it was reprinted in London; again in 1812, in New York and in Boston, 1838. David Rice (1733-1816) was born and bred in Virginia. He was a founder of Hampden-Sidney College in that State. After the Revolution he moved to Kentucky where his role as a leading citizen thrust him into the foreground and

enabled his anti-slavery ideas to permeate and influence large sections of the population. James G. Birney who became a major Abolitionist in the mid-West of the nineteenth century, supplies a striking instance of his influence. The following paragraphs offer the essence of Rice's speech to the 1792 Convention.

As creatures of God we are, with respect to liberty, all equal. If one has a right to live among his fellow creatures, and enjoy his freedom, so has another: if one has a right to enjoy that property he acquires by honest industry, so has another. If I by force take that from another, which he has a just right to according to the law of nature (which is a divine law) which he has never forfeited, and to which he has never relinquished his claim, I am certainly guilty of injustice and robbery; and when the thing taken is the man's liberty, when it is himself, it is the greatest injustice. I injure him much more than if I robbed him of his property on the highway. In this case, it does not belong to him to prove a negative, but to me to prove that such forfeiture has been made; because, if it has not, he is certainly still the proprietor. All he has to do is to show the insufficiency of my proofs.

A slave claims his freedom; he pleads that he is a man, that he was by nature free, that he has not forfeited his freedom, nor relinquished it. Now, unless his master can prove that he is not a man, that he was not born free, or that he has forfeited or relinquished his freedom, he must be judged free; the justice of his claim must be acknowledged. His being long deprived of this right, by force or fraud, does not annihilate it; it remains; it is still his right. When I rob a man of his property, I leave him his liberty, and a capacity of acquiring and possessing more property; but when I deprive him of his liberty, I also deprive him of this capacity; therefore I do him greater

injury, when I deprive him of his liberty than when I rob him of his property. It is in vain for me to plead that I have the sanction of law; for this makes the injury the greater: it arms the community against him, and makes his case desperate.

If my definition of a slave is true, he is a rational creature reduced by the power of legislation to the state of a brute, and thereby deprived of every privilege of humanity, except as above, that he may minister to the ease, luxury, lust, pride, or avarice of another, no better than himself . . .

Slavery naturally tends to destroy all sense of justice and equity. It puffs up the mind with pride; teaches youth a habit of looking upon their fellow creatures with contempt, esteeming them as dogs or devils, and imagining themselves beings of superior dignity and importance to whom all are indebted. This banishes the idea, and unqualifies the mind for the practice, of common justice. If I have, all my days, been accustomed to live at the expense of a black man, without making him any compensation, or considering myself at all in his debt, I cannot think it any great crime to live at the expense of a white man. If I can rob a black man without guilt, I shall contract no great guilt by robbing a white man.

If I have long been accustomed to think a black man was made for me, I may easily take it into my head to think so of a white man. If I have no sense of obligation to do justice to a black man, I can have little to do justice to a white man. In this case, the tinge of our skins, or the place of our nativity, can make but little difference. If I am in principle a friend to slavery, I cannot, to be consistent, think it any crime to rob my country of its property and freedom, whenever my interest calls, and I find it in my power. If I make any difference here, it must be owing to a vicious education, the force of prejudice, or pride of heart.

As a separate state [Rice concluded] we are just now come to birth, and it depends upon our free choice whether we shall be born in this sin or innocent of it.

A Slave Rebel's Letter

(1793)

"We Will Get Free"

Contrary to racist slanders, the Negro people forged a history of great militancy in their unceasing struggles against slavery. These struggles took many forms – flight, sabotage, arson, slow-down; but the highest form was that of organized insurrection and conspiracy. Hundreds of such plots and revolts occurred in the years of American Negro slavery, but it is exceedingly rare that one finds communications in writing from or to Negro rebels, since generally, the postal service was closed to slaves, and the law forbade them to learn to read and write. Nevertheless, records of a few do exist. The following one was found early in August, 1793, on a street in Yorktown, Virginia.

Dear Friend – The great secret that has been so long with our own color has come nearly to a head tho some in our Town has told of it but in such a slight manner it is not believed, we have got about five hundred guns aplenty of lead but not much powder, I hope you have made a good collection of powder and ball and will hold yourself in readiness to strike whenever called for and never be out of the way it will not be long before it will take place, and I am fully satisfied we shall be in full possession of the whole country in a few weeks, since I wrote you last I got a letter from our friend in Charleston he tells me he has listed near six thousand men, there is a gentleman that says he will give us as much powder as we want, and when we begin he will help us all he can, the

damn'd brutes patroles is going all night in Richmond but will soon cill [kill] them all, there an't many, we will appoint a night to begin with fire clubs and shot, we will kill all before us, it will begin in every town in one nite Keep ready to receive orders, when I hear from Charleston again I shall no and will rite to you, he that give you this is a good friend and don't let any body see it, rite me by the same hand he will give it to me out his hand he will be up next week don't be feared have a good heart fight brave and we will get free, I had like to get each [one word is illegible at this point] but God was for me, and I got away, no more now but remain your friend -

Secret Keeper Richmond to Secret Keeper Norfolk.

The First American Convention Against Slavery

(January 1 1794)

As has been observed, anti-slavery sentiment was quite prevalent during and immediately after the Revolution. Under the leadership of Benjamin Franklin and Benjamin Rush, the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society was formed in 1775; ten years later, John Jay helped to form a similar Society in New York. By 1792, Societies had been organized in Delaware, Maryland, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Virginia, New Jersey and Kentucky. Emancipationist, rather than abolitionist, they tended to concentrate on the moral pronouncements rather than organized activity and political struggle.

About 1795, as cotton and sugar production became massive economic enterprises, a dying off of the Societies began, especially those located in the South. What continued was the persistent anti-slavery battles of the Negro people themselves. The really significant national organized struggle against slavery, involving whites and Negroes, started late in the 1820's and made a dramatic appearance in the 1830's.

Nevertheless, these Societies of the 1780's and 90's were harbingers of what was to come, and reflections of the best in the consciences of the white people of America. At a first (and final) national convention in Philadelphia in 1794 the following address "To the Citizens of the United States" was adopted.

Friends and Fellow Citizens . . .

Many reasons concur in persuading us to abolish domestic slavery in our country.

It is inconsistent with the safety of the liberties of the United States.

Freedom and slavery cannot long exist together. An unlimited power over the time, labor, and posterity of our fellow creatures, necessarily unfits men for discharging the public and the private duties of citizens of a republic.

It is inconsistent with sound policy; in exposing the states which permit it, to all those evils which insurrections and the most resentful war have introduced into one of the richest islands in the West Indies*.

It is unfriendly to the present exertions of the inhabitants of Europe, in favor of liberty. What people will advocate freedom, with a zeal proportioned to its blessings, while they view the purest republic in the world tolerating in its bosom a body of slaves?

In vain has the tyranny of kings been rejected, while we permit in our country a domestic despotism, which involves, in its nature, most of the vices and miseries that we have endeavored to avoid.

It is degrading to our rank as men in the scale of being. Let us use our reason and social affections for the pur-

* This has reference to the great slave uprising in Haiti, begun in 1791 and ended - after battles against the French, English and Spanish - with the achievement of independence in 1804.

poses for which they were given, or cease to boast a preeminence over animals, that are unpolluted with our crimes.

But higher motives to justice and humanity towards our fellow creatures remain yet to be mentioned.

Domestic slavery is repugnant to the principles of Christianity. It prostrates every benevolent and just principle of action in the human heart. It is rebellion against the authority of a common Father. It is a practical denial of the extent and efficacy of the death of a common Saviour. It is an usurpation of the prerogative of the Great Sovereign of the universe, who has solemnly claimed an exclusive property in the souls of men.

But if this view of the enormity of the evil of domestic slavery should not affect us, there is one consideration more which ought to alarm and impress us, especially at the present juncture.

It is a violation of a divine precept of universal justice, which has, in no instance, escaped with impunity.

Prohibiting the African Slave Trade (1807)

Of greatest importance in the development of world capitalism – and especially American capitalism – was the enslavement of many of the African peoples. To feed the demand for the labor of the slaves – especially in the sparsely populated and fabulously rich part of the New World to be known as North America – there began in the sixteenth century perhaps the greatest single atrocity in human history, namely, the African slave trade. This immensely profitable business was legal in Europe, Great Britain and the United States until 1807, when enactments in the two latter countries outlawed it.

The law passed in the United States in 1807 – to take effect in 1808 – was based on one of the “compromises” incorporated in the original Constitution of 1787. While no constitutional provision banning slavery was adopted (and the word “slavery” was nowhere mentioned), the institution was bolstered by provision for the recapture of fugitives. A further clause stated that five slaves were to count as three free inhabitants in the population census upon which representation in the Congress was based – the so-called “three-fifths rule.” Yet, a separate provision allowed that twenty years after the adoption of the Constitution, Congress might enact a law prohibiting the African (not the domestic) slave trade. In 1807, with President Jefferson urging the action, Congress did pass such a law, partial text of which follows.

An Act to prohibit the importation of Slaves into any port or place within the jurisdiction of the United States, from and after the first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and eight.

Be it enacted, That from and after the first day of January, one thousand eight hundred and eight, it shall not be lawful to import or bring into the United States or the territories thereof from any foreign kingdom, place, or country, any Negro, mulatto, or person of color, as a slave, or to be held to service or labor.

Sec. 2. That no citizen of the United States, or any other person, shall, from and after the first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and eight, for himself, or themselves, or any other person whatsoever, either as master, factor, or owner, build, fit, equip, load or to otherwise prepare any ship or vessel, in any port or place within the jurisdiction of the United States, nor shall cause any ship or vessel to sail from any port or place within the same, for the purpose of procuring any Negro, mulatto, or person of color, from any

foreign kingdom, place, or country, to be transported to any port or place whatsoever within the jurisdiction of the United States, to be held, sold, or disposed of as slaves, or to be held to service or labor: and if any ship or vessel shall be so fitted out for the purpose aforesaid, or shall be caused to sail so as aforesaid, every such ship or vessel, her tackle, apparel, and furniture, shall be forfeited to the United States, and shall be liable to be seized, prosecuted, and condemned in any of the circuit courts or district courts, for the district where the said ship or vessel may be found or seized

Sec. 4. If any citizen or citizens of the United States, or any person resident within the jurisdiction of the same, shall, from and after the first day of January, one thousand eight hundred and eight, take on board, receive or transport from any of the coasts or kingdoms of Africa, or from any other foreign kingdom, place, or country, any Negro, mulatto, or person of color in any ship or vessel, for the purpose of selling them in any port or place within the jurisdiction of the United States as slaves, or to be held to service or labor, or shall be in any ways aiding or abetting therein, such citizen or citizens, or person, shall severally forfeit and pay five thousand dollars, one moiety thereof to the use of any person or persons who shall sue for and prosecute the same to effect. . . .

Sec. 6. That if any person or persons whatsoever, shall, from and after the first day of January, one thousand eight hundred and eight, purchase or sell any Negro, mulatto, or person of color, for a slave, or to be held to service or labor, who shall have been imported, or brought from any foreign kingdom, place, or country, or from the dominions of any foreign state, immediately adjoining to the United States, after the last day of December, one thousand eight hundred and seven, knowing at the time of such purchase or sale, such Negro, mulatto,

or person of color, was so brought within the jurisdiction of the United States, as aforesaid, such purchaser and seller shall severally forfeit and pay for every Negro, mulatto, or person of color, so purchased or sold as aforesaid, eight hundred dollars

Sec. 7. That if any ship or vessel shall be found, from and after the first day of January, one thousand eight hundred and eight, in any river, port, bay, or harbor, or on the high seas, within the jurisdictional limits of the United States, or hovering on the coast thereof, having on board any Negro, mulatto, or person of color, for the purpose of selling them as slaves, or with intent to land the same, in any port or place within the jurisdiction of the United States, contrary to the prohibition of the act, every such ship or vessel, together with her tackle, apparel, and furniture, and the goods or effects which shall be found on board the same, shall be forfeited to the use of the United States, and may be seized, prosecuted, and condemned, in any court of the United States, having jurisdiction thereof. And it shall be lawful for the President of the United States, and he is hereby authorized, should he deem it expedient, to cause any of the armed vessels of the United States to be manned and employed to cruise on any part of the coast of the United States, or territories thereof, where he may judge attempts will be made to violate the provisions of this act, and to instruct and direct the commanders of armed vessels of the United States, to seize, take, and bring into any port of the United States all such ships or vessels, and moreover to seize, take, or bring into any port of the U.S. all ships or vessels of the U.S. wheresoever found on the high seas, contravening the provisions of this act, to be proceeded against according to law. . . .

John Quincy Adams

(1820)

The Soul's Secrets

Conflicts between the economies based upon slave labor and upon free (including wage) labor go back to the founding of the United States. These tended to become increasingly intense as the respective economies developed. Particular and bitter manifestations of these conflicts arose in connection with the disposal of the federally owned territories.

1820 provided an occasion when the admission of the areas of Maine and Missouri as states came up for Congressional action. The ensuing debate, putting into question the very fate of the Union, rang "like a fire bell in the night," said the aged and retired Thomas Jefferson. A compromise solution brought in Maine as a free state and Missouri as a slave state. In the course of the debate were developed most of the arguments in opposition to slavery and all of the arguments in its favor. Southerners like John Randolph of Virginia, and William Smith and John C. Calhoun of South Carolina brought forward a fully compounded and aggressive defense of slavery.

This is of some interest, since the claim is frequent that the militant defense of slavery was induced in the 1830's by the severe denunciations leveled at it by the Abolitionists. The facts disprove this. Indeed, it is more accurate to state that the vehement attacks upon slavery came from the white Abolitionists as a result of the aggressive defenses of the institution developed years earlier by the plantation lords. In 1820, John Quincy Adams (1767-1848), then Secretary of State and soon to be President (1825-29), entered in his diary the following shrewd, characteristic comment - he would not yet say such things in public - on the content of the slave-owners' arguments, having especially in mind those of Calhoun.

It is, in truth, all perverted sentiment - mistaking labor for slavery, and dominion for freedom. The discussion of this Missouri question has betrayed the secret of their souls. In the abstract they admit that slavery is an evil,

they disclaim all participation in the introduction of it, and cast all upon the shoulders of our grandam Britain. But when probed to the quick upon it, they show at the bottom of their souls pride and vainglory in their condition of masterdom. They fancy themselves more generous and noble-hearted than the plain freemen who labor for subsistence. They look down upon the simplicity of a Yankee's manners, because he has no habits of overbearing like theirs and cannot treat Negroes like dogs. It is among the evils of slavery that it taints the very sources of moral principle. It establishes false estimates of virtue and vice, for what can be more false and heartless than this doctrine which makes the first and holiest rights of humanity to depend upon the color of the skin?

Opening Editorial of the First Negro Newspaper

(1827)

The first Negro newspaper, Freedom's Journal, owned and edited by Samuel Cornish and John B. Russworm, appeared in New York City on March 16 1827. Its first editorial stressed the fight against slavery and discrimination; extracts from it are published below. It should be noted that this paper appeared four years before Garrison's The Liberator.

In presenting our first number to our Patrons, we feel all the diffidence of persons entering upon a new and untried line of business. But a moment's reflection upon the noble objects, which we have in view by the publication of this Journal; the expediency of its appearance

at this time, when so many schemes are in action concerning our people – encourage us to come boldly before an enlightened public. For we believe that a paper devoted to the dissemination of useful knowledge among our brethren, and to their moral and religious improvement, must meet with the cordial approbation of every friend to humanity.

The peculiarities of this Journal render it important that we should advertise to the world our motives by which we are actuated, and the objects which we contemplate.

We wish to plead our own cause. Too long have others spoken for us. Too long has the public been deceived by misrepresentations, in things which concern us dearly . . .

Education being an object of the highest importance to the welfare of society, we shall endeavor to present just and adequate views of it . . .

The civil rights of a people being of the greatest value, it shall ever be our duty to vindicate our brethren, when oppressed; and to lay the case before the public . . .

It is our earnest wish to make our Journal a medium of intercourse between our brethren in the different states of this great confederacy . . .

Useful knowledge of every kind, and everything that relates to Africa, shall find a ready admission into our columns; and as that vast continent becomes daily more known, we trust that many things will come to light, proving that the natives of it are neither so ignorant nor stupid as they have generally been supposed to be.

And while these important subjects shall occupy the columns of the *Freedom's Journal*, we should not be unmindful of our brethren who are still in the iron fetters of bondage. They are our kindred by all the ties of nature; and though but little can be effected by us, still let our sympathies be poured forth, and our prayers in their behalf ascend to Him who is able to succor them.

From the press and the pulpit we have suffered much by being incorrectly represented . . . Our vices and our degradation are ever arrayed against us, but our virtues are passed by unnoticed . . .

In conclusion, whatever concerns us as a people, will ever find a ready admission into the *Freedom's Journal*, interwoven with all the principal news of the day. . . .

David Walker's "Appeal"

(1829)

One of the earliest of the very militant Abolitionist pamphlets came from the pen of David Walker, a free Negro. It was published in Boston in 1829. Walker's pamphlet had the following title, in full: Walker's Appeal, in Four Articles: Together with a Preamble, to the Colored Citizens of the World, but in particular, and very expressly, to those of the United States of America.

Of Walker himself it is known that he was born of a free mother in Wilmington, North Carolina on September 28 1785. Disgust with slavery led him to leave the South when he was perhaps thirty years of age. He settled in Boston and earned his living as a dealer in old clothes. He was active in anti-slavery work, and was a leader in Boston's Colored Association. He served as that city's agent for Freedom's Journal and occasionally contributed to it.

Late in 1829 he published his Appeal, and from then on, until his mysterious death sometime in 1830, he supervised the distribution and reprinting of his booklet, which went into its third printing during the last year of his life. The Appeal created excitement throughout the nation, and especially in the South. The Governors of Georgia and North Carolina and the mayors of several southern cities expressed alarm over it. Several free Negroes and at least one white man - a printer in Milledgeville, Georgia - were found to be actively distributing it.

The Appeal was a long work. Printed below is a brief extract to give its flavor and a hint of its exciting content.

Now, Americans! I ask you candidly, was your sufferings under Great Britain one hundredth part as cruel and tyrannical as you have rendered ours under you? Some of you, no doubt, believe that we will never throw off your murderous government and "provide new guards for our future security." If Satan has made you believe it, will he not deceive you? Do the whites say, I being a black man, ought to be humble, which I readily admit? I ask them, ought they not to be as humble as I? or do they think that they can measure arms with Jehovah?

Will not the Lord yet humble them? or will not these very colored people whom they now treat worse than brutes, yet under God, humble them low down enough? Some of the whites are ignorant enough to tell us that we ought to be submissive to them, that they may keep their feet on our throats. And if we do not submit to be beaten to death by them, we are bad creatures and of course must be damned, etcetera . . . No man may think that my book is made up of conjecture - I have traveled and observed nearly the whole of those things myself, and what little I did not get by my own observation, I received from those among the whites and Blacks, in whom the greatest confidence may be placed.

The Americans may be as vigilant as they please, but they cannot be vigilant enough for the Lord, neither can they hide, where he will not find and bring them out.

* The Lord has not taught the Americans that we will not some day or other throw off their chains and handcuffs from our hands and feet, and their devilish lashes (which some of them shall have enough of yet) from off our backs! [Note in original.]

Josiah Henson Reaches Freedom (1830)

"My Feet First Touched the Canada Shore"

The greatest epic in American history is the story of the Underground Railroad, first created by the Negro people – slaves as passengers, free Negroes as conductors – and later participated in by white friends. The "railroad" was the way to freedom – illegally and secretly and through a thousand different devices – of tens of thousands of slaves. Its existence, and the activities of those who rode it and those who labored for it were among the most telling arguments in favor of abolitionism.

One of the more famous of the fugitives was Josiah Henson (1789–1883), or Father Henson as he was known. Born in Maryland, he managed to come to an agreement with his master while in Kentucky, for the purchase of his freedom. But when he had finally accumulated the necessary money, the master denied the agreement and threatened to sell him into the deep south. Henson ran away, with his family. He became a leader in the large Negro-fugitive community in what is today Ontario, studied for the ministry, and agitated against slavery in the United States. He was the original Uncle Tom as drawn by Harriet Beecher Stowe; his Life was first published in 1849 and was reissued several times thereafter, with introductions by Mrs. Stowe. Here is Henson's own account of his flight to Canada in 1830.

It was not without long thought upon the subject that I devised a plan of escape. But at last I matured it. My mind fully made up, I communicated the intention to my wife. She was overwhelmed with terror. With a woman's instinct she clung to hearth and home. She knew nothing of the wide world beyond, and her imagination peopled it with unseen horrors. We should die in the wilderness – we should be hunted down with bloodhounds – we should be brought back and whipped to death. With tears and supplications she besought me to remain at home, contented. In vain I explained to her

our liability to be torn asunder at any moment; the horrors of the slavery I had lately seen; the happiness we should enjoy together in a land of freedom, safe from all pursuing harm. She had not suffered the bitterness of my lot, nor felt the same longing for deliverance. She was a poor, ignorant, unreasoning slave woman.

I argued the matter with her at various times, till I was satisfied that argument alone would not prevail. I then told her deliberately, that though it would be a cruel trial for me to part with her, I would nevertheless do it, and take all the children with me except the youngest, rather than remain at home, only to be forcibly torn from her, and sent down to linger out a wretched existence in the hell I had lately visited. Again she wept and entreated, but I was sternly resolute. The whole night long she fruitlessly urged me to relent; exhausted and maddened, I left her, in the morning, to go to my work for the day. Before I had gone far, I heard her voice calling me, and waiting till I came up, she said, at last, she would go with me. Blessed relief! my tears of joy flowed faster than had hers of grief.

Our cabin, at this time, was near the [river] landing. The plantation itself extended the whole five miles from the house to the river. There were several distinct farms, all of which I was overseeing, and therefore I was riding about from one to another every day. Our oldest boy was at the house with Master Amos; the rest of the children were with my wife.

The chief practical difficulty that had weighed upon my mind, was connected with the youngest two of the children. They were of three and two years respectively, and of course would have to be carried. Both stout and healthy, they were a heavy burden, and my wife had declared that I should break down under it before I had got five miles from home. Sometime previously I had directed her to make me a large knapsack of tow cloth, large enough to hold them both, and arranged with

strong straps to go round my shoulders. This done, I had practiced carrying them night after night, both to test my own strength and accustom them to submit to it. To them it was fine fun, and to my great joy I found I could manage them successfully. My wife's consent was given on Thursday morning, and I decided to start on the night of the following Saturday. Sunday was a holiday; on Monday and Tuesday I was to be away on farms distant from the house; thus several days would elapse before I should be missed, and by that time I should have got a good start.

It was about the middle of September, and by nine o'clock all was ready. It was a dark, moonless night, when we got into the little skiff, in which I had induced a fellow slave to set us across the river. It was an anxious moment. We sat still as death. In the middle of the stream the good fellow said to me, "It will be the end of me if this is ever found out; but you won't be brought back alive, sir, will you?" "Not if I can help it," I replied; and I thought of the pistols and knife I had bought some time before of a poor white. "And if they're too many for you, and you get seized, you'll never tell my part of this business?" "Not if I'm shot through like a sieve." "That's all," said he, "and God help you."

In due time we landed on the Indiana shore. A hearty, grateful farewell, such as none but companions in danger can know, and I heard the oars of the skiff propelling him home. There I stood in the darkness, my dear ones with me, and the all unknown future before us. But there was little time for reflection. Before daylight should come on, we must put as many miles behind us as possible, and be safely hidden in the woods. We had no friends to look to for assistance, for the population in that section of the country was then bitterly hostile to the fugitive. If discovered, we should be seized and lodged in jail. In God was our only hope. Fervently did I pray to him as we trudged on cautiously and steadily, and as

fast as the darkness and the feebleness of my wife and boys would allow. To her, indeed, I was compelled to talk sternly; she trembled like a leaf, and even then implored me to return.

For a fortnight we pressed steadily on, keeping to the road during the night, hiding whenever a chance vehicle or horseman was heard, and during the day burying ourselves in the woods. Our provisions were rapidly giving out. Two days before reaching Cincinnati they were utterly exhausted. All night long the children cried with hunger, and my poor wife loaded me with reproaches for bringing them into such misery. It was a bitter thing to hear them cry, and God knows I needed encouragement myself. My limbs were weary, and my back and shoulders raw with the burden I carried. A fearful dread of detection ever pursued me, and I would start out of my sleep in terror, my heart beating against my ribs, expecting to find the dogs and slave hunters after me. Had I been alone I would have borne starvation, even to exhaustion, before I would have ventured in sight of a house in quest of food. But now something must be done; it was necessary to run the risk of exposure by daylight upon the road.

The only way to proceed was to adopt a bold course. Accordingly, I left our hiding place, took to the road, and turned towards the south, to lull any suspicion that might be aroused were I to be seen going the other way. Before long I came to a house. A furious dog rushed out at me, and his master following to quiet him, I asked if he would sell me a little bread and meat. He was a surly fellow. "No, he had nothing for niggers!" At the next, I succeeded no better, at first. The man of the house met me in the same style; but his wife, hearing our conversation, said to her husband, "How can you treat any human being so? If a dog was hungry I would give him something to eat." She then added, "We have children, and who knows but they may some day need

the help of a friend." The man laughed, and told her that she might take care of niggers, he wouldn't. She asked me to come in, loaded a plate with venison and bread, and, when I laid it into my handkerchief and put a quarter of a dollar on the table, she quietly took it up and put it in my handkerchief, with an additional quantity of venison. I felt the hot tears roll down my cheeks as she said, "God bless you"; and I hurried away to bless my starving wife and little ones.

A little while after eating the venison, which was quite salty, the children became very thirsty, and groaned and sighed so that I went off stealthily, breaking the bushes to keep my path, to find water. I found a little rill, and drank a large draught. Then I tried to carry some in my hat; but, alas! it leaked. Finally, I took off both shoes, which luckily had no holes in them, rinsed them out, filled them with water, and carried it to my family. They drank it with great delight. I have since then sat at splendidly furnished tables in Canada, the United States, and England; but never did I see any human beings relish anything more than my poor famishing little ones did that refreshing draught out of their father's shoes. That night we made a long run, and two days afterward we reached Cincinnati.

We followed the same course as before – traveling by night and resting by day – till we arrived at the Scioto [river], where we had been told we should strike the military road of General Hull, in the last war [of 1812] with Great Britain, and might then safely travel by day. We found the road, accordingly, by the large sycamore and elms which marked its beginning, and entered upon it with fresh spirits early in the day. Nobody had told us that it was cut through the wilderness, and I had neglected to provide any food, thinking we should soon come to some habitation, where we could be supplied. But we traveled on all day without seeing one, and lay down at night, hungry and weary enough.

The wolves were howling around us, and though too cowardly to approach, their noise terrified my poor wife and children. Nothing remained to us in the morning but a little piece of dried beef, too little, indeed, to satisfy our cravings, but enough to afflict us with intolerable thirst. I divided most of this among us, and then we started for a second day's tramp in the wilderness. A painful day it was to us. The road was rough, the underbrush tore our clothes and exhausted our strength; trees that had blown down blocked the way; we were faint with hunger; and no prospect of relief opened up before us.

We spoke little, but steadily struggled along; I with my babes on my back, my wife aiding the two other children to climb over the fallen trunks and force themselves through the briers. Suddenly, as I was plodding along a little ahead of my wife and the boys, I heard them call to me, and turning round saw my wife prostrate on the ground. "Mother's dying," cried Tom; and when I reached her it seemed really so. From sheer exhaustion she had fallen in surmounting a log. Distracted with anxiety, I feared she was gone. For some minutes no sign of life was manifest; but after a time she opened her eyes, and finally recovering enough to take a few mouthfuls of the beef, her strength returned, and we once more went bravely on our way. I cheered the sad group with hopes I was far from sharing myself. For the first time I was nearly ready to abandon myself to despair. Starvation in the wilderness was the doom that stared me and mine in the face. But again, "man's extremity was God's opportunity."

We had not gone far, and I suppose it was about three o'clock in the afternoon, when we discerned some persons approaching us at no great distance. We were instantly on the alert, as we could hardly expect them to be friends. The advance of a few paces showed me they were Indians, with packs on their shoulders; and they

were so near that if they were hostile it would be useless to try to escape.

So I walked along boldly, till we came close upon them. They were bent down with their burdens, and had not raised their eyes till now; and when they did so, and saw me coming toward them, they looked at me in a frightened sort of way for a moment, and then, setting up a peculiar howl, turned round, and ran as fast as they could. There were three or four of them, and what they were afraid of I could not imagine, unless they supposed I was the devil, whom they had perhaps heard of as black. But, even then, one would have thought my wife and children might have reassured them. However, there was no doubt they were frightened, and we heard their wild and prolonged howls.

My wife was alarmed, too, and thought they were merely running back to collect more of a party, and then to come and murder us; and she wanted to turn back. I told her they were numerous enough to do that, if they wanted to, without help; and that as for turning back, I had had quite too much of the road behind us, and that it would be a ridiculous thing that both parties should run away. If they were disposed to run, I would follow.

We did follow, and the noise soon ceased. As we advanced, we could discover Indians peeping at us from behind the trees, and dodging out of sight if they thought we were looking at them. Presently we came upon their wigwams, and saw a fine-looking, stately Indian, with his arms folded, waiting for us to approach. He was, apparently, the chief; and, saluting us civilly, he soon discovered we were human beings and spoke to his young men, who were scattered about, and made them come in and give up their foolish fears.

And now curiosity seemed to prevail. Each one wanted to touch the children, who were as shy as partridges with their long life in the woods; and as they shrunk away,

and uttered a little cry of alarm, the Indian would jump too, as if he thought they would bite him. However, a little while sufficed to make them understand what we were, and whither we were going, and what we needed; and as little to set them about supplying our wants, feeding us bountifully, and giving us a comfortable wigwam for our night's rest.

The next day we resumed our march, having ascertained from the Indians that we were only about twenty-five miles from the lake. They sent some of their young men to point out the place where we were to turn off, and parted from us with as much kindness as possible.

In passing over the part of Ohio near the lake, where such an extensive plain is found, we came to a spot overflowed by a stream, across which the road passed. I forded it first, with the help of a sounding pole, and then taking the children on my back, first the two little ones, and then the others, one at a time, and, lastly, my wife, I succeeded in getting them safely across. At this time the skin was worn from my back to an extent almost equal to the size of the knapsack.

One night more was spent in the woods, and in the course of the next forenoon we came out upon the wide plain, without trees, which lies south and west of Sandusky city. The houses of the village were in plain sight. About a mile from the lake I hid my wife and children in the bushes, and pushed forward. I was attracted by a house on the left, between which and a small coasting vessel a number of men were passing and repassing with great activity.

Promptly deciding to approach them, I drew near, and scarcely had I come within hailing distance, when the captain of the schooner cried out, "Hollo there, man! you want to work?" "Yes, sir!" shouted I. "Come along, come along; I'll give you a shilling an hour. Must get off with this wind." As I came near, he said, "Oh, you can't work; you're crippled." "Can't I?" said I; and in a

minute I had hold of a bag of corn, and followed the gang in emptying it into the hold. I took my place in the line of laborers next to a colored man, and soon got into conversation with him. "How far is it to Canada?" He gave me a peculiar look, and in a minute I saw he knew all. "Want to go to Canada? Come along with us, then. Our captain's a fine fellow. We're going to Buffalo." "Buffalo; how far is that from Canada?" "Don't you know, man? Across the river."

I now opened my mind frankly to him, and told him about my wife and children. "I'll speak to the captain," said he. He did so, and in a moment the captain took me aside, and said, "The Doctor says you want to go to Buffalo with your family." "Yes, sir." "Well, why not go with me!" was his frank reply. "Doctor says you've got a family." "Yes, sir." "Where do you stop?" "About a mile back." "How long have you been here?" "No time," I answered, after a moment's hesitation. "Come, my good fellow, tell us all about it. You're running away, ain't you?" I saw he was a friend, and opened my heart to him. "How long will it take you to get ready?" "Be here in half an hour, sir." "Well, go along and get them."

Off I started; but before I had run fifty feet, he called me back. "Stop," says he; "you go on getting the grain in. When we get off, I'll lay to over opposite that island, and send a boat back. There's a lot of regular nigger catchers in the town below, and they might suspect if you brought your party out of the bush by daylight." I worked away with a will. Soon the two or three hundred bushels of corn were aboard, the hatches fastened down, anchor raised, and sails hoisted.

I watched the vessel with intense interest as she left her moorings. Away she went before the free breeze. Already she seemed beyond the spot at which the captain agreed to lay to, and still she flew along. My heart sank within me; so near deliverance, and again to have my hopes blasted, again to be cast on my own resources.

I felt that they had been making a mock of my misery. The sun had sunk to rest, and the purple and gold of the west were fading away into gray. Suddenly, however, as I gazed with weary heart, the vessel swung round into the wind, the sails flapped, and she stood motionless. A moment more, and a boat was lowered from her stern, and with steady stroke made for the point at which I stood. I felt that my hour of release had come. On she came, and in ten minutes she rode up handsomely on to the beach.

My Black friend, and two sailors jumped out, and we started off at once for my wife and children. To my horror, they were gone from the place where I left them. Overpowered with fear, I supposed they had been found and carried off. There was no time to lose, and the men told me I would have to go alone. Just at the point of despair, however, I stumbled on one of the children. My wife, it seemed, alarmed at my absence, had given up all for lost, and supposed I had fallen into the hands of the enemy. When she heard my voice, mingled with those of the others, she thought my captors were leading me back to make me discover my family, and in the extremity of her terror she had tried to hide herself. I had hard work to satisfy her. Our long habits of concealment and anxiety had rendered her suspicious of every one; and her agitation was so great that for a time she was incapable of understanding what I said, and went on in a sort of paroxysm of distress and fear. This, however, was soon over, and the kindness of my companions did much to facilitate the matter.

And now we were off for the boat. It required little time to embark our baggage – one convenience, at least, of having nothing. The men bent their backs with a will, and headed steadily for a light hung from the vessel's mast. I was praising God in my soul. Three hearty cheers welcomed us as we reached the schooner and never till my dying day shall I forget the shout of the captain – he

was a Scotchman – “Come up on deck, and clop your wings and crawl like a rooster; you’re a free nigger as sure as the devil.” Round went the vessel, the wind plunged into her sails as though inoculated with the common feeling – the water seethed and hissed passed her sides. Man and nature, and, more than all, I felt the God of man and nature, who breathes love into the heart and maketh the winds his ministers, were with us. My happiness, that night, rose at times to positive pain. Unnerved by so sudden a change from destitution and danger to such kindness and blessed security, I wept like a child.

The next evening we reached Buffalo, but it was too late to cross the river that night. “You see those trees,” said the noble-hearted captain next morning, pointing to a group in the distance; “they grow on free soil, and as soon as your feet touch that you’re a *man*. I want to see you go and be a freeman. I’m poor myself, and have nothing to give you; I only sail the boat for wages; but I’ll see you across. Here, Green,” he said to a ferryman: “what will you take this man and his family over for – he’s got no money?” “Three shillings.” He then took a dollar out of his pocket and gave it to me. Never shall I forget the spirit in which he spoke. He put his hand on my head and said, “Be a good fellow, won’t you?” I felt streams of emotion running down in electric courses from head to foot. “Yes,” said I; “I’ll use my freedom well; I’ll give my soul to God.” He stood waving his hat as we pushed off for the opposite shore. God bless him! God bless him eternally! Amen!

It was the 28th of October, 1830, in the morning, when my feet first touched the Canada shore. I threw myself on the ground, rolled in the sand, seized handfuls of it and kissed them, and danced round till, in the eyes of several who were present, I passed for a madman. “He’s some crazy fellow,” said a Colonel Warren, who happened to be there. “Oh, no, master! Don’t you know?

I'm free!" He burst into a shout of laughter. "Well, I never knew freedom make a man roll in the sand in such a fashion." Still I could not control myself. I hugged and kissed my wife and children, and, until the first exuberant feeling was over, went on as before.

Levi Coffin

(1876)

Servicing the Underground Railroad

Levi Coffin (1789-1877) was born in North Carolina and lived there until 1826 when he moved to Indiana. He is another of the many Southern whites who became outstanding leaders in the Abolitionist crusade. Coffin's special contribution lay in his devoted and heroic work in behalf of fugitive slaves; so famous was he in this that he became known as "President" of the Underground Railroad. From his Reminiscences, published in 1876, is taken a section telling how he started his work on the railroad - note, here, that it was the prior activities of free Negroes that led him into this - and giving some idea of the nature of that work.

Soon after we located at Newport [now known as Fountain City, Indiana], I found that we were on a line of the U.G.R.R. Fugitives often passed through that place, and generally stopped among the colored people. There was in that neighborhood a number of families of free colored people, mostly from North Carolina, who were the descendants of slaves who had been liberated by Friends many years before, and sent to free States at the expense of North Carolina Yearly Meeting.

I learned that the fugitive slaves who took refuge with these people were often pursued and captured, the colored people not being very skillful in concealing them, or shrewd in making arrangements to forward them to

Canada. I was pained to hear of the capture of these fugitives, and inquired of some of the Friends in our village why they did not take them in and secret them, when they were pursued, and then aid them on their way to Canada? I found that they were afraid of the penalty of the law.

I was willing to receive and aid as many fugitives as were disposed to come to my house. I knew that my wife's feelings and sympathies regarding this matter were the same as mine, and that she was willing to do her part. It soon became known to the colored people in our neighborhood and others that our house was a depot where the hunted and harassed fugitive journeying northward, on the Underground Railroad, could find succor and sympathy. It also became known at other depots on the various lines that converged at Newport.

In the winter of 1826-27, fugitives began to come to our house, and as it became more widely known on different routes that the slaves fleeing from bondage would find a welcome and shelter at our house, and be forwarded safely on their journey, the number increased. Friends in the neighborhood, who had formerly stood aloof from the work, fearful of the penalty of the law, were encouraged to engage in it when they saw the fearless manner in which I acted, and the success that attended my efforts. They would contribute to clothe the fugitives, and would aid in forwarding them on their way, but were timid about sheltering them under their roof; so that part of the work devolved on us. Some seemed really glad to see the work go on, if somebody else would do it. Others doubted the propriety of it, and tried to discourage me, and dissuade me from running such risks. They manifested great concern for my safety and pecuniary interests, telling me that such a course of action would injure my business and perhaps ruin me; that I ought to consider the welfare of my family; and warning me that my life was in danger, as there were

many threats made against me by the slave hunters and those who sympathized with them.

Many of my pro-slavery customers left me for a time, my sales [he manufactured linseed oil] were diminished, and for a while my business prospects were discouraging, yet my faith was not shaken, nor my efforts for the slaves lessened. New customers soon came in to fill the places of those who had left me. New settlements were rapidly forming to the north of us, and our own was filling up with emigrants from North Carolina and other states. My trade increased, and I enlarged my business. I was blessed in all my efforts and succeeded beyond my expectations.

The Underground Railroad business increased as time advanced, and it was attended with heavy expenses, which I could not have borne had not my affairs been prosperous. I found it necessary to keep a team and a wagon always at command, to convey the fugitive slaves on their journey. Sometimes, when we had large companies, one or two other teams and wagons were required. These journeys had to be made at night, often through deep mud and bad roads, and along byways that were seldom traveled. Every precaution to evade pursuit had to be used, as the hunters were often on the track, and sometimes ahead of the slaves. We had different routes for sending the fugitives to depots, ten, fifteen, or twenty miles distant, and when we heard of slave hunters having passed on one road, we forwarded our passengers by another.

In some instances, where we learned that the pursuers were ahead of them, we sent a messenger and had the fugitives brought back to my house to remain in concealment until the bloodhounds in human shape had lost the trail and given up the pursuit.

I soon became extensively known to the friends of the slaves, at different points on the Ohio River, where fugitives generally crossed, and to those northward of

us on the various routes leading to Canada. Depots were established on the different lines of the Underground Railroad, south and north of Newport, and a perfect understanding was maintained between those who kept them.

Three principal lines from the South converged at my house; one from Cincinnati, one from Madison, and one from Jeffersonville, Indiana. The roads were always in running order, the connections were good, the conductors active and zealous, and there was no lack of passengers. Seldom a week passed without our receiving passengers by this mysterious road. We found it necessary to be always prepared to receive such company and properly care for them.

We knew not what night or what hour of the night we would be roused from slumber by a gentle rap at the door. That was the signal announcing the arrival of a train of the Underground Railroad, for the locomotive did not whistle, nor make any unnecessary noise. I have often been awakened by this signal, and sprang out of bed in the dark and opened the door. Outside in the cold or rain, there would be a two-horse wagon loaded with fugitives, perhaps the greater part of them women and children.

I would invite them, in a low tone, to come in, and they would follow me into the darkened house without a word, for we knew not who might be watching and listening.

When they were all safely inside and the door fastened, I would cover the windows, strike a light and build a good fire. By this time my wife would be up and preparing victuals for them, and in a short time the cold and hungry fugitives would be made comfortable. I would accompany the conductor of the train to the stable, and care for the horses, that had, perhaps, been driven twenty-five or thirty miles that night, through the cold and rain. The fugitives would rest on pallets before the

fire the rest of the night. Frequently, wagon-loads of passengers from the different lines have met at our house, having no previous knowledge of each other. The companies varied in number, from two or three fugitives to seventeen.

The care of so many necessitated much work and anxiety on our part, but we assumed the burden of our own free will and bore it cheerfully. It was never too cold or stormy, or the hour of the night too late, for my wife to rise from sleep, and provide food and comfortable lodging for the fugitives. Her sympathy for those in distress never tired, and her efforts in their behalf never abated.

This work was kept up during the time we lived at Newport, a period of more than twenty years. The number of fugitives varied considerably in different years, but the annual average was more than one hundred. They generally came to us destitute of clothing, and were often barefooted. Clothing must be collected and kept on hand, if possible, and money must be raised to buy shoes, and purchase goods to make garments for women and children. The young ladies in the neighborhood organized a sewing society, and met at our house frequently, to make clothes for the fugitives.

Sometimes when the fugitives came to us destitute, we kept them several days, until they could be provided with comfortable clothes. This depended on the circumstances of the danger. If they had come a long distance and had been out several weeks or months – as was sometimes the case – and it was not probable that hunters were on their track, we thought it safe for them to remain with us until fitted for traveling through the thinly settled country to the North. Sometimes fugitives have come to our house in rags, footsore and toilworn, and almost wild, having been out for several months traveling at night, hiding in canebrakes or thickets during the day, often being lost and making little headway at night, particularly in cloudy

weather, when the North Star could not be seen, sometimes almost perishing for want of food, and afraid of every white person they saw, even after they came into a free state, knowing that slaves were often captured and taken back after crossing the Ohio River.

Such as these we have kept until they were recruited in strength, provided with clothes, and able to travel. When they first came to us they were generally unwilling to tell their stories, or let us know what part of the South they came from. They would not give their names, or the names of their masters, correctly, fearing that they would be betrayed. In several instances fugitives came to our house sick from exhaustion and exposure, and lay several weeks.

NEGRO SPIRITUALS

To the Negro slave, religion was a deeply personal expression of his hopes, experiences, needs. Religious worship was permitted him only under the master's surveillance, and the sole teaching allowed was docility. But, he made of his own religion an instrument of solace and a weapon of struggle. Out of it grew what the slaves called "bush-harbor" meetings. Held at night, in swamps, forests or fastnesses of the South, these were secret gatherings, with sentries posted at the four corners armed with bells or kettles or other noisemakers to warn of the approach of the patrol. Here, elected ministers preached the religion of a Lord who hated slave-owners and who loved the slaves – loved them so that He opened the way to freedom. Here were formed many slave-revolts; and many slave-revolt leaders – Nat Turner was one – were "ordained" ministers. Here were sung the Spirituals, songs which were religious, reflective of the Negro's deep yearning for freedom and equality on earth, a call to struggle and a means of informing the slave community of the escape of one of their people – or any other important piece of news. The first Spiritual which follows is one that Frederick Douglass said gave him the idea of fleeing from slavery.

RUN TO JESUS

Run to Jesus, shun the danger,
I don't expect to stay much longer here.
He will be our dearest friend
And will help us in the end.
Run to Jesus, shun the danger,
I don't expect to stay much longer here.
Oh, I thought I heard them say,
There were lions in the way.
Run to Jesus, shun the danger,
I don't expect to stay much longer here.

SWING LOW, SWEET CHARIOT

Swing low, sweet chariot,
Coming for to carry me home,
Swing low, sweet chariot
Coming for to carry me home.

I looked over Jordan
And what did I see,
Coming for to carry me home?
A band of angels coming after me,
Coming for to carry me home.

Swing low, sweet chariot,
Coming for to carry me home,
Swing low, sweet chariot
Coming for to carry me home.

If you get there before I do,
Coming for to carry me home,
Tell all my friends I'm coming too,
Coming for to carry me home.

PETER, GO RING THEM BELLS

Oh, Peter, go ring them bells,
Peter, go ring them bells,
Peter, go ring them bells,
I heard from heaven today.
I wonder where my mother is gone,
I wonder where my mother is gone,
I heard from heaven today.
I heard from heaven today,
I heard from heaven today,
I thank God, and I thank you too,
I heard from heaven today.

MANY THOUSAND GONE

No more auction block for me,
No more, no more;
No more auction block for me,
Many thousand gone.

No more peck o' corn for me,
No more, no more;
No more peck o' corn for me,
Many thousand gone.

No more driver's lash for me,
No more, no more;
No more driver's lash for me,
Many thousand gone.

No more pint o' salt for me,
No more, no more;
No more pint o' salt for me,
Many thousand gone.

No more hundred lash for me,
No more, no more;
No more hundred lash for me,
Many thousand gone.

FAREWELL, MY BROTHER

Farewell, my brother, farewell forever,
Fare you well, my brother, now,
For I am going home.
Oh good-bye, good-bye,
For I am bound to leave you,
Oh good-bye, good-bye,
For I am going home.

THE GOSPEL TRAIN

The gospel train is coming,
I hear it just at hand,
I hear the car wheels moving,
And rumblin' thro' the land.
 Get on board, little children,
 Get on board, little children,
 Get on board, little children,
For there's room for many a more.

The fare is cheap and all can go,
The rich and poor are there,
No second-class on board the train,
No difference in the fare.
 Get on board, little children,
 Get on board, little children,
 Get on board, little children,
For there's room for many a more.

DEEP RIVER

Deep river,
My home is over Jordan,
Deep river, Lord,
I want to cross over into camp ground, Lord,
I want to cross over into camp ground, Lord,
I want to cross over into camp ground, Lord,
I want to cross over into camp ground.

Oh, don't you want to go to that Gospel feast,
That promised land where all is peace?
Lord, I want to cross over into camp ground, Lord,
I want to cross over into camp ground, Lord,
I want to cross over into camp ground, Lord,
I want to cross over into camp ground.

THERE'S A MEETING HERE TONIGHT

Get you ready, there's a meeting here tonight,
Come along, there's a meeting here tonight,
I know you by your daily walk,
There's a meeting here tonight.
Camp-meeting down in the wilderness,
There's a meeting here tonight,
I know it's among the Methodists,
There's a meeting here tonight.

IN THAT GREAT GITTIN'-UP MORNING

I'm a-going to tell you about the coming of the Saviour,
Fare you well! Fare you well!
There's a better day a-coming,
Fare you well! Fare you well!
Oh, preachers, fold your Bibles,
Fare you well! Fare you well!
Prayer-makers, pray no more,
Fare you well! Fare you well!
For the last soul's been converted,
Fare you well! Fare you well!
Fare you well! Fare you well!
In that great gittin'-up morning,
Fare you well! Fare you well!

HARD TRIALS

The foxes have holes in the ground,
The birds have nests in the air,
The Christians have a hiding place,
But we poor sinners have none;
Now ain't them hard trials, tribulations?
I'm going to live with God!

SHINE, SHINE

Shine, shine, I'll meet you in the morning,
Shine, shine, I'll meet you in the morning,
Shine, shine, I'll meet you in the morning,
Oh! my soul's going to shine, shine.

I'm going to sit at the welcome-table,
I'm going to sit at the welcome-table,
I'm going to sit at the welcome-table,
Oh! my soul's going to shine, shine.

I'm going to walk all about that city,
I'm going to walk all about that city,
I'm going to walk all about that city,
Oh! my soul's going to shine, shine.

SOMETIMES I FEEL LIKE A MOTHERLESS CHILD

Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,
Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,
A long ways from home, a long ways from home.
True believer, a long ways from home.

WAIT A LITTLE WHILE

Wait a little while,
Then we'll sing the new song,
Wait a little while,
Then we'll sing the new song.

My heavenly home is bright and fair,
We will sing the new song,
No pain or sorrow enter there;
We will sing the new song.

THERE'S NO HIDING PLACE DOWN THERE

There's no hiding place down there,
There's no hiding place down there.
Oh I went to the rock to hide my face,
The rock cried out, "No hiding place,"
There's no hiding place down there.
Oh, the rock cried, "I'm burning too,"
Oh, the rock cried, "I'm burning too,"
Oh, the rock cried out, "I'm burning too,
I want to go to heaven as well as you."
There's no hiding place down there.

KEEP YOUR LAMPS TRIMMED

Keep your lamps trimmed and a-burning,
Keep your lamps trimmed and a-burning,
Keep your lamps trimmed and a-burning,
For this work's almost done.

Brothers, don't grow weary,
Brothers, don't grow weary,
Brothers, don't grow weary,
For this work's almost done.

ANGELS WAITING AT THE DOOR

My sister's took her flight and gone home,
And the angel's waiting at the door.
My sister's took her flight and gone home,
And the angel's waiting at the door.
Tell all my Father's children,
Don't you grieve for me;
Tell all my Father's children,
Don't you grieve for me.

NOBODY KNOWS THE TROUBLE I SEE

Nobody knows the trouble I see,
Nobody knows but Jesus;
Nobody knows the trouble I see,
Glory, hallelujah!
Sometimes I'm up
Sometimes I'm down,
Oh, yes, Lord;
Sometimes I'm almost to the ground,
Oh, yes, Lord,
Although you see me going 'long so,
Oh, yes, Lord;
I have my trials here below,
Oh, yes, Lord.
Oh! Nobody knows the trouble I see,
Nobody knows but Jesus;
Nobody knows the trouble I see,
Glory, hallelujah!

OH, WASN'T THAT A WIDE RIVER?

Oh, wasn't that a wide river,
River of Jordan, Lord?
Wide river!
There's one more river to cross.

Oh, the river of Jordan is so wide,
One more river to cross;
I don't know how to get on the other side;
One more river to cross.

I have some friends before me gone,
One more river to cross;
By the grace of God I'll follow on;
One more river to cross.

CHILDREN, WE ALL SHALL BE FREE

Children, we all shall be free,
Children, we all shall be free,
Children, we all shall be free,
When the Lord shall appear.

We want no cowards in our band,
That from their colors fly,
We call for valiant-hearted men,
That are not afraid to die.

Children, we all shall be free,
Children, we all shall be free,
Children, we all shall be free,
When the Lord shall appear.

WE ARE ALMOST HOME

We are almost home,
We are almost home
To ring those charming bells.
Oh, come along brothers, come along,
Come along, brothers, come along,
Come along, brothers, come along
To ring those charming bells.

OH, FREEDOM!

Oh, freedom! oh, freedom!
Oh, freedom over me!
And before I'd be a slave,
I'll be buried in my grave,
And go home to my Lord
And be free.

North Carolinians Appeal

(1830)

"To the People of North Carolina"

The Quakers had been among the pioneer white people in the South to voice opposition to slavery. Many of them continued to articulate this stand long after most Southerners had become partisans of slavery or had been persuaded to keep mute their criticism of it. Some Quakers "adjusted" to the slave institution and thus gave it tacit support. Others, and their number was many, were driven from the South, particularly after the open slave unrest in the twelve years from 1790 to 1802.

The Manumission Society of North Carolina, formed in 1816, was largely made up of Quakers. It continued to exist, despite intense harassment, until 1834.

In 1830 it published (in Greensboro, N. C.) a long "Address" to the people of North Carolina (republished in New York in 1860), the gist of which is conveyed in the extracts that follow.

Incidentally, the vigor of this attack upon the nature of slavery was never surpassed in the language of the most militant Northern Abolitionist in the years ahead.

Whatever the people of this State may be with respect to information on other subjects, on this they are very destitute, owing, we suppose, to the "awful delicacy" we hear so much about, and which we would briefly examine. Then what renders this subject so *awfully* delicate? Is it the incapacity of the people to investigate it? Is the discussion of this subject *delicate* because it favors the *innocent* and condemns the *guilty*? Is it *delicate* because it shows republicans their inconsistency? Is it *delicate* because it accuses the professors of the Christian Religion of crimes which a Mahometan would blush to commit?

Is it *delicate* because it impeaches the right to hold human beings as property?

Is it *delicate* because free men are ashamed or afraid for slaves to know that they incline to do them justice? . . .

Under the protection offered by our Constitution in the 18th section of a Declaration of Rights made by the Representatives of the Freemen of this State, we now set out a calm and more full investigation of the evils consequent on the existence of absolute slavery. And as we cherish no unkind feelings toward any class of our citizens, but prompted by philanthropy and patriotism, we labor to expose inconsistencies, and to hold up to public gaze, and we hope to public execration, principles that tend to destroy our liberties, our morals, and even our souls; we hope that every man having an opportunity to examine this subject with us, will do it impartially and honestly, in attending to, and investigating the following propositions:

I. Our slave system is radically evil.

II. It is founded in injustice and cruelty.

III. It is a fruitful source of pride, idleness and tyranny.

IV. It increases depravity in the human heart, while it inflames and nourishes a numerous train of dark and brutal passions and lusts, disgraceful to human nature, and destructive of the general welfare.

V. It is contrary to the plain and simple maxims of the Christian Revelation, or religion of Christ.

After demonstrating these propositions we shall briefly state in conclusion some of the most prominent features in the plan which we would adopt for the abolition of slavery....

The following principles, most of which are deducible from the foregoing remarks, we give as the primary principles held by us as a Society — together with a brief

outline of the plan which we would adopt for the abolition of the evil complained of: and

First: We hold, with the venerable founder of our republican institutions, that liberty is the *inalienable birthright* of every human being; and that God has made no difference between the *white* and *Black*.

Second: We believe that, in a national and individual point of view, the Negro is entitled to the same measure of justice with the white man, and that neither his skin, nor any other material consequence attending him, can afford a reasonable pretext for his oppression.

Third: We believe that the evil is one which affects every part of the community, in a greater or less degree; and may therefore be termed a national evil; and that both emancipation and colonization are necessary to its removal.

With regard to emancipation, we hold first, that it should be gradual; so conducted as not to interfere with the rights of property*; – But secondly, that it should be universal. This however, is not enough. The debt which we owe the Negroes is not sufficiently paid by merely suffering the oppressed to go free. We believe it to be the duty of our countrymen, to use all possible means to enlighten and elevate the minds, ennoble the hearts, and improve and elevate the character of the Negroes among us, that they may be prepared both to enjoy and appre-

*The reference to compensated and gradual emancipation distinguishes this program from the immediate and uncompensated emancipation demanded by the Abolitionists. Furthermore, the advocacy of colonization – *i. e.*, the transportation out of the country of freed Negroes – was strongly opposed by the Abolitionists as an impractical device, concocted by slaveholders who feared the presence of free Negroes, and a proposal stemming from race prejudice and repudiated by the Negro people themselves.

ciate liberty, and to discharge the important duties assigned them by their creator, as well to himself as to their fellow creatures, with honor to God and benefit to mankind.

In order to remove this alarming evil which is threatening in its aspect, and which if continued long enough, must be so destructive in its consequences, we would recommend the following:

First: Let a law be enacted, preventing further introduction of slaves into the State for sale or hire.

Second: Let a law be enacted facilitating individual emancipation, by allowing such masters as wish to liberate their slaves, to do so; provided the liberated slave be capable of earning a comfortable livelihood.

Third: We would recommend a law to facilitate individual emancipation still further, by authorizing Negroes to make contracts with their masters by which they may purchase their own freedom.

Fourth: We would recommend the passage of laws imposing still further restraints upon the abuse of slaves, and affording the unlawfully abused slave, at the same time, easy means of redress.

Fifth: We would recommend a law providing for the instruction of slaves in the elementary principles of language, at least so far as to enable them to read Holy Scriptures.

Sixth: We would provide by law that all children in this State after a certain period, should be free at a certain age; and from and after the passing of said act, no Negroes should be removed from the State in such a way as to lose the benefit of said act upon their posterity.

William Lloyd Garrison

(1831)

"And I Will Be Heard"

The very symbol of Abolitionism was William Lloyd Garrison (1805-1879) born in Newburyport, Massachusetts, in a poor family. Largely self-educated, he labored during several years of his youth for a local newspaper. In 1826 he became editor of the Newburyport Free Press, and then began to support various reform efforts. In 1829 he went to Baltimore to join Benjamin Lundy (1789-1839), a Quaker anti-slavery pioneer, and the publisher of a paper called The Genius of Universal Emancipation. Lundy had been putting out his journal now and again since 1821, moving it from Tennessee to Baltimore, and later, for a brief period, to Washington.

While associated with the Lundy paper, Garrison was jailed for criminal libel - he had attacked a wealthy slave-trader in severest terms. He spent two months in prison. On his return to New England, he decided to launch his own unequivocal newspaper devoted to the cause of the immediate emancipation of slaves. The first number of The Liberator appeared January 1 1831; it appeared thereafter regularly - despite great difficulties and trials - until December 29 1865, the year of the passage of the 13th Amendment prohibiting slavery in the United States.

Garrison tended towards sectarianism and possessed a highly developed ego which made working with him difficult. But he remained firm to the revolutionary principle of immediate emancipation and he fought bravely against great odds on behalf of a noble cause. He commanded an extremely vivid pen, as will be apparent from the text of the editorial which launched the first number of his The Liberator.

In the month of August, I issued proposals for publishing *The Liberator* in Washington City; but the enterprise, though hailed in different sections of the country, was palsied by public indifference. Since that time, the removal of the *Genius of Universal Emancipation* to the Seat of

Government has rendered less imperious the establishment of a similar periodical in that quarter.

During my recent tour for the purpose of exciting the minds of the people by a series of discourses on the subject of slavery, every place that I visited gave fresh evidence of the fact, that a greater revolution in public sentiment was to be effected in the free states – *and particularly in New England* – than at the South. I found contempt more bitter, opposition more active, detraction more relentless, prejudice more stubborn, and apathy more frozen, than among slave-owners themselves. Of course, there were individual exceptions to the contrary. This state of things afflicted, but did not dishearten me. I determined, at every hazard, to lift up the standard of emancipation in the eyes of the nation, *within sight of Bunker Hill and in the birthplace of liberty*. That standard is now unfurled; and long may it float, unhurt by the spoliations of time or the missiles of a desperate foe – yea, till every chain be broken, and every bondman set free! Let Southern oppressors tremble – let their secret abettors tremble – let their Northern apologists tremble – let all the enemies of the persecuted Blacks tremble.

I deem the publication of my original Prospectus unnecessary, as it has obtained a wide circulation. The principles therein inculcated will be steadily pursued in this paper, excepting that I shall not array myself as the political partisan of any man. In defending the great cause of human rights, I wish to derive the assistance of all religions and of all parties.

Assenting to the “self-evident truth” maintained in the American Declaration of Independence, “that all men are created equal, and endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights – among which are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness,” I shall strenuously contend for the immediate enfranchisement of our slave population. In Park Street Church, on the Fourth of July 1829, in an address on slavery, I unreflectingly assented to the popu-

lar but pernicious doctrine of *gradual* abolition. I seize this opportunity to make a full and unequivocal recantation, and thus publicly to ask pardon of my God, of my country, and of my brethren, the poor slaves, for having uttered a sentiment so full of timidity, injustice, and absurdity. A similar recantation, from my pen, was published in the *Genius of Universal Emancipation* at Baltimore, in September, 1829. My conscience is now satisfied.

I am aware, that many object to the severity of my language; but is there not cause for severity? I *will* be as harsh as truth, and as uncompromising as justice. On this subject, I do not wish to think, or speak, or write, with moderation. No! No! Tell a man whose house is on fire, to give a moderate alarm; tell him to moderately rescue his wife from the hands of the ravisher; tell the mother to gradually extricate her babe from the fire into which it has fallen – but urge me not to use moderation in a cause like the present. I am in earnest – I will not equivocate – I will not excuse – I will not retreat a single inch – AND I WILL BE HEARD.

The apathy of the people is enough to make every statue leap from its pedestal, and to hasten the resurrection of the dead.

It is pretended that I am retarding the cause of emancipation by the coarseness of my invective, and the precipitancy of my measures. *The charge is not true.* On this question my influence – humble as it is – is felt at this moment to a considerable extent, and shall be felt in coming years – not perniciously, but beneficially – not as a curse, but as a blessing; and posterity will bear testimony that I was right. I desire to thank God that He enables me to disregard “the fear of man which bringeth a snare,” and to speak His truth in its simplicity and power. . . .

The Negro's Fourth of July

(1832)

About ten per cent of the American people did not officially celebrate the Fourth of July until after the Emancipation Proclamation. The Negro population – that part of it which was not slave – held an observance on July 5, and used the occasion to reiterate their demand for freedom and equality. Typical is the address of a leading Connecticut Negro, Peter Osborne, delivered July 5 1832, in the New Haven African Church.

Fellow Citizens – On account of the misfortune of our color, our Fourth of July comes on the fifth; but I hope and trust that when the Declaration of Independence is fully executed, which declares that all men, without respect to person, were born free and equal, we may then have our Fourth of July on the fourth. It is thought by many that this is as impossible to take place, as it is for the leopard to change his spots; but I anticipate that the time is approaching very fast. The signs . . . are all favorable to our cause. Why, then, should we forbear contending for the civil rights of free countrymen? What man of national feeling would slumber in content under the yoke of slavery in his own country? . . .

If we desire to see our brethren relieved from the tyrannical yoke of slavery and oppression in the South, if we would enjoy the civil rights of free countrymen, it is high time for us to be up and doing. It has been said that we have already done well, but we can do better. What more can we do? Why, we must unite with our brethren in the North, in the South, and in the East and West, and then with the Declaration of Independence in one hand, and the Holy Bible in the other, I think we might courageously give battle to the most powerful enemy to this cause. The Declaration of Independence has declared to man, without speaking of color, that all men are born

free and equal. Has it not declared this freedom and equality to us too?

What man would content himself, and say nothing of the rights of man, with two millions of his brethren in bondage? Let us contend for the prize. Let us all unite, and with one accord declare that we will not leave our own country to emigrate to Liberia, nor elsewhere, to be civilized or christianized. Let us make it known to America that we are not barbarians; that we are not inhuman beings; that this is our native country; that our forefathers have planted trees in America for us, and we intend to stay and eat the fruit.

Our forefathers fought, bled and died to achieve the independence of the United States. Why should we forbear contending for the prize? It becomes every colored citizen in the United States to step forward boldly, and gallantly defend his rights. What has there been done within a few years, since the union of the colored people? Are not the times more favorable to us now, than they were ten years ago? Are we not gaining ground? Yes – and had we begun this work forty years ago, I do not hesitate to say that there would not have been, at this day, a slave in the United States. Take courage, then, ye African-Americans! Don't give up the conflict, for the glorious prize can be won.

The American Anti-Slavery Society (1833)

Constitution and Declaration

Various local and state wide anti-slavery and emancipationist societies had existed in the United States – some reflection of this has appeared in earlier pages – during the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. By the late 1820's and early 1830's, as the slave economy matured and rapidly expanded, and as a contrasting free labor economy – with important sproutings of

industry – also grew very rapidly, the whole question of slavery came urgently to the fore (as it did in the British and French empires). One of the important expressions of this development was the founding in Philadelphia in 1833, of the first national anti-slavery organization, devoted to the immediate and uncompensated emancipation of the Negro slaves: the American Anti-Slavery Society. The Constitution of that Society – the reader will note also its opposition to colonization and its espousal of the end to all racist discrimination – and the Declaration of Sentiments adopted by the Convention, are published below.

This Society remained the main organizational form of Abolitionism until about 1840. Thereafter, splits and divisions occurred, and Garrison's sectarianism took its toll. In its founding and work Negro-white unity existed – three of the original signers of the Declaration of Sentiments were Negroes; the document was drawn up by Garrison at the home of a Negro, Frederick A. Hinton, and four of the original Board of Managers of the Society were Negroes.

Whereas: the Most High God “hath made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on all the face of the earth,” and hath commanded them to love their neighbors as themselves; and whereas our National Existence is based upon this principle, as recognized in the Declaration of Independence, “that all mankind are created equal, and that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”; and

Whereas: after the lapse of nearly sixty years, since the faith and honor of the American people were pledged to this avowal, before Almighty God and the World, nearly one-sixth part of the nation are held in bondage by their fellow citizens; and

Whereas: Slavery is contrary to the principles of natural justice, of our republican form of government, and of the Christian religion, and is destructive of the

prosperity of the country, while it is endangering the peace, union, and liberties of the States; and

Whereas: we believe it the duty and interest of the masters immediately to emancipate their slaves, and that no scheme of expatriation, either voluntary or by compulsion, can remove this great, increasing evil, and

Whereas: we believe that it is practicable, by appeals to the consciences, hearts, and interests of the people, to awaken a public sentiment throughout the nation that will be opposed to the continuance of Slavery in any part of the Republic, and by effecting the speedy abolition of Slavery, prevent a general convulsion; and

Whereas: we believe we owe it to the oppressed, to our fellow citizens who hold slaves, to our whole country, to posterity, and to God, to do all that is lawfully in our power to bring about the extinction of Slavery, we do hereby agree, with a prayerful reliance on the Divine aid, to form ourselves into a society, to be governed by the following Constitution:

Article I. This Society shall be called the AMERICAN ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY.

Article II. The object of this Society is the entire abolition of Slavery in the United States. While it admits that each State, in which Slavery exists, has, by the Constitution of the United States, the exclusive right to *legislate* in regard to its abolition in said State, it shall aim to convince all our fellow citizens, by arguments addressed to their understandings and consciences, that Slaveholding is a heinous crime in the sight of God, and that the duty, safety, and best interests of all concerned, require its *immediate abandonment*, without expatriation. The Society will also endeavor, in a constitutional way to influence Congress to put an end to the domestic Slave trade, and to abolish Slavery in all those portions of our

common country which come under its control, especially in the District of Columbia, and likewise to prevent the extension of it to any State that may be hereafter admitted to the Union.

Article III. This Society shall aim to elevate the character and condition of the people of color, by encouraging their intellectual, moral, and religious improvement, and by removing public prejudice, that thus they may, according to their intellectual and moral worth, share an equality with the whites, of civil and religious privileges; but this Society will never, in any way, countenance the oppressed in vindicating their rights by resorting to physical force.

Article IV. Any person who consents to the principles of this Constitution, who contributes to the funds of this Society and is not a Slaveholder, may be a member of this Society and shall be entitled to vote at the meetings.

DECLARATION OF SENTIMENTS:

The convention assembled in the city of Philadelphia, to organize a National Anti-Slavery Society, promptly seize the opportunity to promulgate the following Declaration of Sentiments, as cherished by them in relation to the enslavement of one-sixth portion of the American people. . . .

We have met together for the achievement of an enterprise, without which that of our fathers is incomplete; and which, for its magnitude, solemnity, and probable results upon the destiny of the world, as far transcends theirs as moral truth does physical force.

In purity of motive, in earnestness of zeal, in decision of purpose, in intrepidity of action, in steadfastness of faith, in sincerity of spirit, we would not be inferior . . .

Their grievances, great as they were, were trifling in comparison with the wrongs and sufferings of those for whom we plead. Our fathers were never slaves – never bought

and sold like cattle – never shut out from the light of knowledge and religion – never subjected to the lash of brutal taskmasters.

But those, for whose emancipation we are striving – constituting at the present time at least one-sixth part of our countrymen – are recognized by law, and treated by their fellow beings, as brute beasts; are plundered daily of the fruits of their toil without redress; really enjoy no constitutional nor legal protection from licentious and murderous outrages upon their persons; and are ruthlessly torn asunder – the tender babe from the arms of its frantic mother – the heartbroken wife from her weeping husband – at the caprice or pleasure of irresponsible tyrants. For the crime of having a dark complexion, they suffer the pangs of hunger, the infliction of stripes, the ignominy of brutal servitude. They are kept in heathenish darkness by laws expressly enacted to make their instruction a criminal offense.

These are the prominent circumstances in the condition of more than two million people, the proof of which may be found in thousands of indisputable facts, and in the laws of the slaveholding States.

Hence we maintain – that, in view of the civil and religious privileges of this nation, the guilt of its oppression is unequalled by any other on the face of the earth; and, therefore, that it is bound to repent instantly, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free. . . .

It is piracy to buy or steal a native African, and subject him to servitude. Surely, the sin is as great to enslave an American as an African.

Therefore we believe and affirm – that there is no difference, in principle, between the African slave trade and American Slavery;

That every American citizen, who detains a human being in involuntary bondage as his property, is, according to Scripture (Ex. XXI, 16), a man stealer;

That the slaves ought instantly to be set free, and brought under the protection of the law;

That if they had lived from the time of Pharaoh down to the present period, and had been entailed through successive generations, their right to be free could never have been alienated, but their claims would have constantly risen in solemnity;

That all those laws which are now in force, admitting the right of Slavery, are therefore, before God, utterly null and void; being an audacious usurpation of the Divine prerogative, a daring infringement on the law of nature, a base overthrow of the very foundations of the social compact, a complete extinction of all the relations, endearments and obligations of mankind, and a presumptuous transgression of all the holy commandments; and that therefore they ought instantly to be abrogated.

We further believe and affirm - that all persons of color, who possess the qualifications which are demanded of others, ought to be admitted forthwith to the enjoyment of the same privileges, and the exercise of the same prerogatives, as others; and that the paths of preferment, of wealth and of intelligence, should be opened as widely to them as to persons of a white complexion.

We maintain that no compensation should be given to the planters emancipating their slaves;

Because it would be a surrender of the fundamental principle, that man cannot hold property in man;

Because Slavery is a crime, and therefore is not an article to be sold;

Because the holders of slaves are not the just proprietors of what they claim; freeing the slave is not depriving them of property, but restoring it to its rightful owner; it is not wronging the master, but righting the slave - restoring him to himself;

Because immediate and general emancipation would only destroy nominal, not real property; it would not amputate a limb or break a bone of the slaves, but by

infusing motives into their breasts, would make them doubly valuable to the masters as free laborers; and

Because, if compensation is to be given at all, it should be given to the outraged and guiltless slaves, and not to those who have plundered and abused them.

We regard as delusive, cruel and dangerous, any scheme of expatriation which pretends to aid, either directly or indirectly, in the emancipation of the slaves, or to be a substitute for the immediate and total abolition of Slavery.

We fully and unanimously recognize the sovereignty of each State, to legislate exclusively on the subject of the Slavery which is tolerated within its limits; we concede that Congress, under the present national compact, has no right to interfere with any of the slave States, in relation to this momentous subject;

But we maintain that Congress has a right, and is solemnly bound, to suppress the domestic slave trade between the several States, and to abolish Slavery in those portions of our territory which the Constitution has placed under its exclusive jurisdiction.

We also maintain that there are, at the present time, the highest obligations resting upon the people of the free States to remove Slavery by moral and political action, as prescribed in the Constitution of the United States. They are now living under a pledge of their tremendous physical force, to fasten the galling fetters of tyranny upon the limbs of millions in the Southern States; they are liable to be called at any moment to suppress a general insurrection of the slaves; they authorize the slave-owner to vote for three-fifths of his slaves as property, and thus enable him to perpetuate his oppression; they support a standing army at the South for its protection; and they seize the slave, who has escaped into their territories, and send him back to be tortured by an enraged master or a brutal driver. This relation to Slavery is criminal, and full of danger: IT MUST BE BROKEN UP.

These are our views and principles – these our designs and measures. With entire confidence in the overruling justice of God, we plant ourselves upon the Declaration of our Independence and the truths of Divine Revelation, as upon the Everlasting Rock. . . .

Frederick Douglass (1834) and the Slave-Breaker

The greatest Negro American of the nineteenth century was Frederick Douglass, born a slave in 1817 in Maryland. In 1840, he succeeded in escaping, and soon thereafter he became a participant in the anti-slavery movement. His acumen, eloquence, fearlessness – his embodiment of the horror of slavery and the magnificent potential of a liberated Negro people – made him the single most effective battler against Negro slavery in the United States. His interests were wide: he was, for example, among the first men to advocate full women's rights; his learning – he was self-taught – was considerable. He developed a remarkable dialectical approach to questions and while there is no evidence that he knew the works or ideas of Marx and Engels, it is clear that Feuerbach did impress him, for the one piece of statuary in his home was a bust of that German philosopher.

In his influential autobiography – which was first printed in 1845 – Douglass describes his early tempering under the ministrations of a professional slave breaker, in 1834.

If at any one time of my life, more than another, I was made to drink the bitterest dregs of slavery, that time was during the first six months of my stay with this man Covey. We worked a'l weathers. It was never too hot, or too cold; it could never rain, blow, snow, or hail too hard for us to work in the field. Work, work, work was scarcely more than the order of the day than of the night.

The longest days were too short for him, and the shortest nights were too long for him. I was somewhat unmanageable at first, but a few months of this discipline tamed me. Mr. Covey succeeded in *breaking* me – in body, soul, and spirit. My natural elasticity was crushed; my intellect languished; the disposition to read departed*, the cheerful spark that lingered about my eye died out; the dark night of slavery closed in upon me, and behold a man transformed to a brute!

Sunday was my only leisure time. I spent this under some large tree, in a sort of beastlike stupor between sleeping and waking. At times I would rise up and a flash of energetic freedom would dart through my soul, accompanied with a faint beam of hope that flickered for a moment, and then vanished. I sank down again mourning over my wretched condition. I was sometimes tempted to take my life and that of Mr. Covey, but was prevented by a combination of hope and fear. My sufferings, as I remember them now, seem like a dream rather than like a stern reality.

Our house stood within a few rods of the Chesapeake Bay, whose broad bosom was ever white with sails from every quarter of the habitable globe. Those beautiful vessels, robed in white, and so delightful to the eyes of free men, were to me so many shrouded ghosts, to terrify and torment me with thoughts of my wretched condition. I have often, in the deep stillness of a summer's Sabbath, stood all alone upon the banks of that noble bay and traced, with saddened heart and tearful eye, the countless number of sails moving off to the mighty ocean. The sight of these affected me powerfully. . . .

I shall never be able to narrate half the mental ex-

* As a boy, Douglass was required to deliver his master's son to and from school; while performing this chore, the young Douglass secretly gained access to an elementary reader and taught himself how to read.

perience through which it was my lot to pass, during my stay at Covey's. I was completely wrecked, changed, and bewildered; goaded almost to madness at one time, and at another reconciling myself to my wretched condition. All the kindness I had received at Baltimore, all my former hopes and aspirations for usefulness in the world, and even the happy moments spent in the exercises of religion, contrasted with my then present lot, served but to increase my anguish.

I suffered bodily as well as mentally. I had neither sufficient time in which to eat, or to sleep, except on Sundays. The overwork, and the brutal chastisements of which I was the victim, combined with that evergnawing and soul-devouring thought – *I am a slave – and a slave for life – a slave with no rational ground to hope for freedom* – rendered me a living embodiment of mental and physical wretchedness.

Negro Children Speak

(1834)

In March, 1834, was opened the first school for Negroes in Cincinnati, Ohio, paid for by themselves. The city then had about 1200 Negroes. The great demand for education led, within a year, to the opening of three more schools, with white and Negro teachers, for adults as well as children. Late in 1834, youngsters at these schools were asked to write on: "What do you think most about?" Five answers have survived. Here they are.

1. Dear schoolmates, we are going next summer to buy a farm and to work part of the day and to study the other part if we live to see it and come home part of the day to see our mothers and sisters and cousins if we are got

any and see our kind folks and to be good boys and when we get a man to get the poor slaves from bondage. . . .

From a seven-year-old.

2. Dear school-master, I now inform you in these few lines, that what we are studying for is to try to get the yoke of slavery broke and the chains parted asunder and slaveholding cease for ever. O that God would change the hearts of our fellow men.

From a twelve-year-old.

3. In my youthful days, dear Lord, let me remember my creator, Lord. Teach me to do his will. Bless the cause of abolition – bless the heralds of the truth that we trust God has sent out to declare the rights of man. We trust that it may be the means of moving mountains of sin off all the families. My mother and stepfather, my sister and myself were all born in slavery. The Lord did let the oppressed go free. Roll on the happy period that all nations shall know the Lord. We thank him for his many blessings.

From an eleven-year-old.

4. Dear Sir: This is to inform you that I have two cousins in slavery who are entitled to their freedom. They have done everything that the will requires and now they won't let them go. They talk of selling them down the river. If this was your case what would you do? Please give me your advice.

From a ten-year-old.

5. Let us look back and see the state in which the Britons and Saxons and Germans lived. They had no learning and had not the knowledge of letters. But now look, some of them are our first men. Look at king Alfred and see what a great man he was. He at one time did not

know his a, b, c, but before his death he commanded armies and nations. He was never discouraged but always looked forward and studied the harder. I think if the colored people study like king Alfred they will soon do away the evil of slavery. I can't see how the Americans can call this a land of freedom where so much slavery is.

From a sixteen-year-old.

The "Fathers and Rulers" Petition (1834)

One of the main forms of mass struggle conducted by the Abolitionists was that of petitioning Congress for the elimination of various aspects of the institution of slavery that directly fell within the ken of the federal government's power. One of the most common of these petitions was a printed form, first used in 1834, attached to which were to be the signatures of women - who played so outstanding a role in the entire anti-slavery crusade. This particular petition, known as the "Fathers and Rulers" petition from its salutation, was drafted by Theodore Dwight Weld and was in use until about 1840. Tens of thousands of them, containing the signatures of hundreds of thousands of women throughout the Northern states were presented to Congress. The text of this petition follows.*

Fathers and Rulers of our Country,

Suffer us, we pray you, with the sympathies we are constrained to feel as wives, as mothers, and as daughters, to plead with you in behalf of a long oppressed and deeply injured class of native Americans, residing in that portion of our country which is under your exclusive control. We should poorly estimate the virtues which

* Source: G. H. Barnes and D. L. Dumond, eds., *Weld-Grimké Letters* (2 vols., N. Y., 1934), I, pp. 175-76.

ought ever to distinguish your honorable body could we anticipate any other than a favorable hearing when our appeal is to men, to philanthropists, to patriots, to the legislators and guardians of a Christian people. We should be less than women, if the nameless and unnumbered wrongs of which the slaves of our sex are made the defenseless victims, did not fill us with horror and constrain us, in earnestness and agony of spirit to pray for their deliverance. By day and by night, their woes and wrongs rise up before us, throwing shades of mournful contrast over the joys of domestic life, and filling our hearts with sadness at the recollection of those whose hearths are desolate.

Nor do we forget, in the contemplation of their other sufferings, the intellectual and moral degradation to which they are doomed; how the soul formed for companionship of angels, is despoiled and brutified, and consigned to ignorance, pollution, and ruin.

Surely then, as the representatives of a people professedly Christian, you will bear with us when we express our solemn apprehensions in the language of the patriotic Jefferson "we tremble for our country when we remember that God is just, and that his justice cannot sleep forever," and when in obedience to a divine command "we remember them who are in bonds as bound with them." Impelled by these sentiments, we solemnly purpose, the grace of God assisting, to importune high Heaven with prayer, and our national Legislature with appeals, until this Christian people abjure forever a traffic in the souls of men, and the groans of the oppressed no longer ascend to God from the dust where they now welter.

We do not ask your honorable body to transcend your constitutional powers, by legislating on the subject of slavery within the boundaries of any slaveholding State; but we do conjure you to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia where you exercise exclusive jurisdiction. In

the name of humanity, justice, equal rights and impartial law, our country's weal, her honor and her cherished hopes, we earnestly implore for this our humble petition, your favorable regard. If both in Christian and heathen lands, Kings have revoked their edicts, at the intercession of woman, and tyrants have relented when she appeared a suppliant for mercy, surely we may hope that the Legislators of a free, enlightened and Christian people will lend their ears to our appeals, when the only boon we crave is the restoration of rights unjustly wrested from the innocent and defenseless.

And as in duty bound your petitioners will ever pray.

Youth and Abolitionism

(1835)

Like all revolutionary movements, Abolitionism attracted the fervent support of the youth – Negro and white. Indicative is the fact that of the twenty-one immortals who fought with John Brown at Harper's Ferry in 1859, nineteen were not yet thirty years of age. Although they represented only a small fraction of the youth at the time, students were notable supporters of the anti-slavery effort. An example of their help in spreading the word, and in familiarizing themselves with the issues, is offered in the invitation sent from students at Ohio University in Athens, in July, 1835, to Theodore Weld. Many such invitations were received and acted upon by dozens of Abolitionist leaders.*

Mr. Weld,

Having been informed that you are laboring in the cause of Abolition at Marietta, and being desirous of hearing a course of lectures on that subject, we have

* Source: Barnes & Dumond, eds., cited work, I, pp. 226–27.

deemed it proper to send you this note, requesting you to give us a call as you pass along.

We whose names are hereto subscribed [the letter is signed by five students] are students of the Ohio University. We should therefore be unwilling to take upon ourselves the responsibility of giving you an invitation in the name of the citizens of the village [of Athens]. We are however warranted in believing that you would meet with a general good reception! We have made some inquiry among the people on this subject. Some of the principal citizens would be *willing* to hear, others would be *glad*. A spirit of inquiry has lately been awakened especially in the Institution. There is however *much*, and some bitter opposition. A discussion, notwithstanding, we think would be safe and we hope profitable.

James G. Birney on Slavery

(1835)

"The Antagonist Principles"

One of the earliest and clearest enunciations of the basic conflict between the principles of slavery and those of liberty – what was later to be called "the irrepressible conflict" – came from the pen of James G. Birney (1792–1857) in a letter he wrote to Gerrit Smith. Birney, born in Kentucky into a wealthy slaveholding family, was trained in the law. In 1818 he moved to Alabama and entered politics, serving as Mayor of Huntsville and as member of the State legislature. His anti-slavery feelings developed gradually. In 1832 he returned to Kentucky; two years later he freed his slaves, and in 1835 he organized the Kentucky Anti-Slavery Society. In 1836, he was forced to move to the non-slave*

* Smith (1797–1874) inherited great landed wealth in upstate New York. He was one of the few men of wealth who actively supported Abolitionism, and was one of the organizers of the Liberty Party in 1840. He was elected to Congress in 1853, and was a close friend of John Brown.

State of Ohio. Thereafter he was the leading political Abolitionist of the Midwest and presidential candidate of the Liberty Party in 1840 and 1844. A severe injury suffered in 1845 removed him from public life and he died before the Civil War. The following is from a letter written September 13 1835, while Birney was still editing an anti-slavery paper in Kentucky. He began his letter by informing Smith that persecution would force him soon to leave.*

And yet it is not time for us to sit down and do nothing. It is as much as all the patriotism in our country can do to keep alive the spirit of liberty in the *free* states. The contest is becoming – has become – one, not alone of freedom for the Black, but of freedom for the white. It has now become absolutely necessary that slavery should cease in order that freedom may be preserved in any portion of our land. The antagonist principles of liberty and slavery have been roused into action and one or the other must be victorious. There will be no cessation of the strife, until slavery shall be exterminated, or liberty destroyed.

Whittier, Anti-Slavery Poet

(1835)

"One Voice Shall Thunder, We Are Free!"

Second perhaps only to Longfellow, the most popular American poet of the nineteenth century was John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892). His poems, "Snow-Bound," "Barbara Frietchie," and "The Barefoot Boy" were loved and recited by millions of

* Source: Quoted in: Betty Fladeland, *James Gillespie Birney Slaveholder to Abolitionist* (Cornell Univ. Press, Ithaca, 1955, p. 122).

Americans. His most significant work, however, was the collection of great anti-slavery poems which poured from his pen for over thirty years until the abomination was ended. Whittier was discovered as a poet by Garrison who published his first poem in 1826. He announced himself an Abolitionist in 1833, served in the Massachusetts legislature, 1834-35, and actively fought in the Abolitionist ranks thereafter.

An example of Whittier's stirring anti-slavery poetry is his "Stanzas For The Times." The "times" referred to was August 21 1835 when Faneuil Hall, in Boston - symbol of the Revolution - was used for a pro-slavery meeting where Abolitionism was denounced, and the demand made that all "agitation of the question" be stopped since it endangered business enterprise. Whittier's reply follows.

Is this the land our fathers loved,
The freedom which they toiled to win?
Is this the soil whereon they moved?
Are these the graves they slumber in?
Are we the sons by whom are borne
The mantles which the dead have worn?

And shall we crouch above these graves,
With craven soul and fettered lip?
Yoked in with marked and branded slaves,
And tremble at the driver's whip?
Bend to the earth our pliant knees,
And speak but as our masters please?

Shall outraged Nature cease to feel?
Shall Mercy's tears no longer flow?
Shall ruffian threats of cord and steel,
The dungeon's gloom, the assassin's blow,
Turn back the spirit roused to save
The Truth, our Country, and the slave?

Of human skulls that shrine was made,
Round which the priests of Mexico
Before their loathsome idol prayed;
Is Freedom's altar fashioned so?
And must we yield to Freedom's God,
As offering meet, the Negro's blood?

Shall tongue be mute, when deeds are wrought
Which well might shame extremest hell?
Shall freemen lock the indignant thought?
Shall Pity's bosom cease to swell?
Shall Honor bleed? shall Truth succumb?
Shall pen, and press, and soul be dumb?

No; by each spot of haunted ground,
Where Freedom weeps her children's fall;
By Plymouth's rock, and Bunker's mound;
By Griswold's stained and shattered wall;
By Warren's ghost, by Langdon's shade;
By all the memories of our dead!

By their enlarging souls, which burst
The bands and fetters round them set;
By the free Pilgrim spirit nursed
Within our inmost bosoms yet,
By all above, around, below,
Be ours the indignant answer — No!

No; guided by our country's laws,
For truth, and right, and suffering man,
Be ours to strive in Freedom's cause,
As Christians may, as freemen can!
Still pouring on unwilling ears
That truth oppression only fears.

What! Shall we guard our neighbor still,
While woman shrieks beneath his rod,
And while he tramples down at will

The image of a common God?
Shall watch and ward be round him set,
Of Northern nerve and bayonet?

And shall we know and share with him
The danger and the growing shame?
And see our Freedom's light grow dim,
Which should have filled the world with flame?
And, writing, feel, where'er we turn,
A world's reproach around us burn?

Is't not enough that this is borne?
And asks our haughty neighbor more?
Must fetters which his slaves have worn
Clank round the Yankee farmer's door?
Must he be told, beside his plow,
What he must speak, and when, and how?

Must he be told his freedom stands
On Slavery's dark foundations strong;
On breaking hearts and fettered hands,
On robbery, and crime, and wrong?
That all his fathers taught is vain –
That Freedom's emblem is the chain?

Its life, its soul, from slavery drawn!
False, foul, profane! Go, teach as well
Of holy Truth from Falsehood born!
Of Heaven refreshed by airs from Hell!
Of Virtue in the arms of Vice!
Of Demons planting Paradise!

Rail on, then, brethren of the South,
Ye shall not hear the truth the less;
No seal is on the Yankee's mouth,
No fetter on the Yankee's press!
From our Green Mountains to the sea,
One voice shall thunder, We are free!

Elijah P. Lovejoy "Open Letter" (1835)

The most famous martyr to the causes of Negro emancipation and freedom of the press was Rev. Elijah P. Lovejoy (1802-1837), born in Maine, educated at Princeton and teacher and newspaper editor in St. Louis, Missouri. In the latter city he edited The Observer, a Weekly which propounded a rather mild anti-slavery stand. The propertied bosses of the city were not satisfied with its mildness; they prevailed on the publisher of the paper to issue a disavowal of abolitionism. Lovejoy, in turn, repudiated his publisher's action and, in the issue dated November 5 1835, published the following Open Letter "To My Fellow Citizens."

The hostility did not abate, but rather increased. The publisher yielded completely and in 1836 Lovejoy was forced to move. He then went to the little town of Alton, in southern Illinois, where he started a new Observer. Experience made Lovejoy more radical in his anti-slavery views and the hostility of the vested interests followed him to the free state as it had driven him from the slave. His press was destroyed three times in Alton. Finally, on November 7 1837, while he and a few friends, arms in hand, were defending their fourth press from destruction by a pro-slavery mob, Lovejoy was murdered, with five bullets piercing his body. Lovejoy's martyrdom stirred the nation and helped to convert many thousands of Americans to the cause of Abolitionism.

See the danger and the natural and inevitable result to which the first step here will lead. Today a public meeting declares that you shall not discuss the subject of Slavery, in any of its bearings, civil or religious. Right or wrong, the press must be silent. Tomorrow, another meeting decides that it is against the peace of society, that the principles of Popery shall be discussed, and the edict goes forth to muzzle the press. The next day, it is in a similar manner declared that not a word must be said against distilleries, dram shops, or drunkenness. And so on to the end of the chapter.

The truth is, my fellow citizens, if you give ground a single inch, there is no stopping place. I deem it, therefore, my duty to take my stand upon the Constitution. Here is firm ground – I feel it be such. And I do most respectfully, yet decidedly, declare to you my fixed determination to maintain this ground. We have slaves, it is true, but *I* am not one. I am a citizen of these United States, a citizen of Missouri, freeborn; and having never forfeited the inestimable privileges attached to such a condition, I cannot consent to surrender them. But while I maintain them, I hope to do it with all that meekness and humility that become a Christian, and especially a Christian minister. I am ready, not to fight, but to suffer, and if need be, to die for them . . .

I *do*, therefore, as an American citizen, and Christian patriot, and in the name of Liberty, and Law, and *Religion*, solemnly PROTEST against all these attempts, howsoever or by whomsoever made, to frown down the liberty of the press, and forbid the free expression of opinion. Under a deep sense of my obligations to my country, the church, and my God, I declare it to be my fixed purpose to submit to no such dictation. *And I am prepared to abide the consequences.* I have appealed to the constitution and laws of my country; if they fail to protect me, I APPEAL TO GOD, and with Him I cheerfully rest my cause.

Fellow citizens, they told me that if I returned to the city, from my late absence, you would surely lay violent hands upon me, and many friends besought me not to come. I disregarded their advice, because I plainly saw, or thought I saw, that the Lord would have me come. And up to this moment that conviction of duty has continued to strengthen, until now I have not a shadow of doubt that I did right. I have appeared openly among you, in your streets and market-places, and now I openly and publicly throw myself into your hands. I can die at my post, but I cannot desert it.

Labor and Abolitionism

(1836-1864)

Capitalism breeds and needs racism. While this is a general truth, it has particular applicability to the history of the United States. This history, revolving about the special exploitation of the Negro people, as it so largely does - at different periods of the national history Negro Americans constituted from 10 to 20 per cent of the total population - is permeated by a carefully cultivated and systematically sustained white chauvinism.

The ruling class, then, has had considerable success in infecting masses of American white people with this poison, and the infection has penetrated among working people as well. Indeed, historically, the greatest single source of weakness in the labor and trade-union movements in the United States is the boss-made poison of racism. This is partially offset by the Negro-white unity which has existed in the United States and of which dramatic and important examples appear and reappear in American history. It is a living unity - not one of avowal alone - and its existence has been most marked among the poor, the workers and farmers, the so-called "common" people.*

The Abolitionist movement itself speaks eloquently of this unity. The movement knew few wealthy participants, but it united many workers, even Southern workers. It was anathema to the slave-owners and the propertied interests generally; hence records of it are exceedingly scattered and brief. Yet there do persist some records of this unity and of the understanding that the enslavement of Negro laborers challenged the security of those workers who were white and were by law, "free." Some instances of this follow.

* Source: The present editor developed aspects of labor's relation to the struggle against slavery, and pointed to the deep reality of class struggle - among the white population - in the slave South in an article published in *The Communist* (N. Y.) February and March, 1939. This, in somewhat expanded form, appears in his *Toward Negro Freedom* (N. Y., 1956) pp. 44-67. Additional material, of a specialized kind, is in the editor's *The Labor Movement in the South During Slavery* (N. Y., 1954). Very important material is in P. S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States* (Vol. I, N. Y., 1947); and in Bernard Mandel, *Labor: Free and Slave* (N. Y., 1955).

In 1836, the Working Men's Association of England asked the working class of the United States: "Why, when she [the United States] has afforded a home and an asylum for the destitute and oppressed among all nations, should oppression in her own land be legalized and bondage tolerated?" Lewis Gunn, a Philadelphia labor leader, in transmitting this to the United States through the pages of the Philadelphia working class newspaper, *National Laborer*, September 13 1836, wrote:

"Our voice should *thunder* from Maine to Georgia, and from the Atlantic to the Mississippi – the voice of a nation of *Republicans and Christians* demanding with all the authority of moral power, *demanding* the immediate liberation of the bondsmen."

Cassius M. Clay of Kentucky, in his Lexington newspaper, *The True American*, took a very class-conscious position in his attacks upon slavery. Thus, in that paper on July 15 1845, he wrote:

"When a journeyman printer *underworks* the usual rates he is considered an enemy to the balance of the fraternity, and is called a *rat*. Now the slaveholders have *ratted* us with the 180 000 slaves [then in Kentucky] till forbearance longer on our part has become criminal. They have *ratted* us out of the means of making our own schools . . . They have *ratted* us out of the press. They have *ratted* us out of the legislature . . .

"What words can we use to arouse you to a sense of our deep and damning degradation! Men, we have one remedy, untried, omnipotent, power of *freemen* left – the ballot box: yes, thank God, we can yet *vote*! Our wives, our sisters, our children, raise their imploring eyes to us; save us from this overwhelming ignominy – this insufferable woe; place us upon that equality for which our

fathers bled and died. Come, if we are not worse than brutish beasts, let us but speak the word, and slavery *shall die!*"

A workers' mass meeting, assembled in Boston in May, 1848, to hail the democratic revolutions then convulsing Europe, resolved: "That while we rejoice in the organization of free institutions in the Old World, we are not indifferent to their support at home, and that we regard the despotic attitude of the slave power at the South, and the domineering ascendancy of a Monied Oligarchy in the North, as equally hostile to the interests of Labor, and incompatible with the preservation of popular rights."

Refugees from the suppression of the 1848 Revolutions – especially from Germany – strengthened the Abolitionist movement wherever it was they settled, whether in Texas, Missouri, New York or Ohio. Marxists were among these refugees, and they, individually and through the pioneer Communist clubs organized in the United States beginning in 1850, were strong partisans of Abolitionism. Characteristic was the resolve of the Communist Club in Cleveland, in November, 1851 to "use all means which are adapted to abolishing slavery, an institution which is so wholly repugnant to the principles of true Democracy."

Workers and poor farmers, separately and as part of organized bodies, formed, of course, the overwhelming majority of the Armies of the Union which destroyed the Confederacy. Even before the war's end, the growth of industrial concentrations and the threatening rise of a domineering "money power" was felt by workers and their organizations. One has, therefore, this kind of editorial from the *Daily Evening Voice*, published in Boston by the Massachusetts Workingmen's Assembly, on December 20 1864:

"An oligarchy at the South, holding in its grasp the destinies of millions of the human race, and made mad by their lust for additional power, and, from the very nature of things, antagonistic to free labor, has struck a blow at the national life, and men stand appalled at the magnitude of the struggle. And here at the North, where every village, town and hamlet gives evidence of the industry of the people; where we have, through our institutions, instilled into our minds and fixed in our hearts a sacred love of liberty, an oligarchy, comparatively small, strikes a blow at the independence, nay, the very manhood of the industrial classes, when it denies their right to combine for mutual protection and for advancement."

Angelina E. Grimké on Slavery (1838)

"As A Southerner It Is My Duty . . ."

Among the many white Southerners who played outstanding roles in the anti-slavery movement, none was more effective than Angelina E. Grimké and Sarah M. Grimké, South Carolina's "dauntless daughters." Sarah (1792-1873) and Angelina (1805-1879) were the daughters of the Chief Justice of the South Carolina Supreme Court and the sisters of the Chief Justice of the Ohio Supreme Court. The question of slavery had been troubling them since their youth, and on a visit to Philadelphia in 1832, they embraced Quakerism. Soon thereafter, they exiled themselves from the South, and in 1835 they joined the Abolitionist movement. Angelina married Theodore D. Weld. Both sisters remained staunch fighters for Negro freedom and the equality of women.

Something of the style and content of their work, and an indication of their splendid courage - which all devoted Abolitionists required - comes through in the speech Angelina delivered at a Women's Anti-Slavery Convention held in Penn-

sylvania Hall on May 16 1838 (two days after her marriage). An anti-Abolitionist mob encircled and stoned the meeting while she was speaking, as will appear in the extract from the contemporary pamphlet quoting her remarks. The next day a mob set fire to the Hall.

Men, brethren and fathers, mothers, daughters, sisters, what came ye out for? A rod shaken with the wind?

Is it curiosity merely, or a deep sympathy with the perishing slave, that has brought this large audience together? (*A yell from the mob without the building.*) Those voices without ought to awaken and call out our warmest sympathies. Deluded beings! "They know not what they do." They know not that they are undermining their own rights and their own happiness, temporal and eternal.

Do you ask, "What has the North to do with slavery?" Hear it – hear it. Those voices without tell us that the spirit of slavery is *here*, and has been roused to wrath by our abolition speeches and conventions: for surely liberty would not foam and tear herself with rage, because her friends are multiplied daily, and meetings are held in quick succession to set forth her virtues and extend her peaceful kingdom. This opposition shows that slavery has done its deadliest work in the hearts of our citizens. Do you ask, then, "What has the North to do?" I answer, cast out first the spirit of slavery from your own hearts, and then lend your aid to convert the South.

Each one present has work to do, be his or her situation what it may, however limited their means, or insignificant their supposed influence. The great men of this country will not do this work; the church will never do it. A desire to please the world, to keep the favor of all parties and of all conditions, makes them dumb on this and every other unpopular subject. They have be-

come worldly wise, and therefore God, in his wisdom, employs them not to carry on his plans of reformation and salvation. He hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak to overcome the mighty.

As a Southerner I feel it is my duty to stand up here tonight and bear testimony against slavery. I have seen it – I have seen it. I know it has horrors that can never be described. I was brought up under its wing: I witnessed for many years its demoralizing influences, and its destructiveness to human happiness.

It is admitted by some that the slave is not happy under the *worst* forms of slavery. But I have *never* seen a happy slave. I have seen him dance in his chains, it is true; but he was not happy. There is a wide difference between happiness and mirth. Man cannot enjoy the former while his manhood is destroyed, and that part of the being which is necessary to the making, and to the enjoyment of happiness is completely blotted out. The slaves, however, may be, and sometimes are, mirthful. When hope is extinguished, they say, "let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." (*Just then stones were thrown at the windows – a great noise without, and commotion within.*)

What is a mob? What would the breaking of every window be? What would the leveling of this Hall be? Any evidence that we are wrong, or that slavery is a good and wholesome institution? What if the mob should now burst in upon us, break up our meeting and commit violence upon our persons – would this be anything compared with what the slaves endure? No, no: and we do not remember them "as bound with them," if we shrink in the time of peril, or feel unwilling to sacrifice ourselves, if need be, for their sake. (*Great noise.*) I thank the Lord that there is yet life left enough to feel the truth, even though it rages at it – that conscience is not so completely seared as to be unmoved by the truth of the living God.

Many persons go to the South for a season, and are hospitably entertained in the parlor and at the table of the slaveholder. They never enter the huts of the slaves; they know nothing of the dark side of the picture, and they return home with praises on their lips of the generous character of those with whom they have tarried. Or if they have witnessed the cruelties of slavery, by remaining silent spectators they have naturally become callous – an insensibility has ensued which prepares them to apologize even for barbarity. Nothing but the corrupting influence of slavery on the hearts of the Northern people can induce them to apologize for it; and much will have been done for the destruction of Southern slavery when we have so reformed the North that no one here will be willing to risk his reputation by advocating or even excusing the holding of men as property. The South know it, and acknowledge that as fast as our principles prevail, the hold of the master must be relaxed. (*Another outbreak of mobocratic spirit, and some confusion in the house.*)

How wonderfully constituted is the human mind! How it resists, as long as it can, all efforts made to reclaim from error! I feel that all this disturbance is but an evidence that our efforts are the best that could have been adopted, or else the friends of slavery would not care for what we say and do. The South know what we do. I am thankful that they are reached by our efforts.

Many times have I wept in the land of my birth, over the system of slavery . . . But in the midst of temptation I was preserved, and my sympathy grew warmer, and my hatred of slavery more inveterate, until at last I have exiled myself from my native land because I could no longer endure to hear the wailing of the slave. I fled to the land of Penn; for here, thought I, sympathy for the slave will surely be found. But I found it not. The people were kind and hospitable, but the slave had no place in their thoughts . . . Animated with hope, nay, with an assurance of the triumph of liberty and good will to man,

I will lift up my voice like a trumpet, and show this people their transgression, their sins of omission towards the slave, and what they can do towards affecting Southern minds, and overthrowing Southern oppression.

We may talk of occupying neutral ground, but on this subject, in its present attitude, there is no such thing as neutral ground. He that is not for us is against us, and he that gathereth not with us, scattereth abroad. If you are on what you suppose to be neutral ground, the South looks upon you as on the side of the oppressor... (*Shoutings, stones thrown against the windows, etc.*)

There is nothing to be feared from those who would stop our mouths, but they themselves should fear and tremble. The current is even now setting fast against them. If the arm of the North had not caused the Bastille of slavery to totter to its foundation, you would not hear those cries. A few years ago, and the South felt secure, and with a contemptuous sneer asked, "Who are the abolitionists? The abolitionists are nothing." Ay, in one sense they were nothing, and they are nothing still. But in this we rejoice, that "God has chosen things that are not to bring to nought things that are." (*Mob again disturbed the meeting.*)

We often hear the question asked, "What shall we do?" Here is an opportunity for doing something now. Every man and every woman present may do something by showing that we fear not a mob, and, in the midst of threatenings and revilings, by opening our mouths for the dumb and pleading the cause of those who are ready to perish.

Fanny Kemble

(1838-1839)

"Residence in Georgia"

One of the most celebrated English actresses of the nineteenth century was Frances (Fanny) Anne Kemble (1809-1893). Sweeping all before her in England, in such parts as Juliet, Lady Macbeth and Portia, she made a triumphal tour of the United States beginning in 1832. In 1834 she married Pierce Butler, one of the richest slave-owners in the country, and went with him to his Georgia plantation. This marriage ended in divorce in 1848. Not the least of the difficulties facing the couple was Fanny Kemble's horror at American plantation slavery. Her Journal of a Residence on a Georgia Plantation in 1838-1839 records some of her experiences.

The Slave Quarters

These cabins consist of one room, about twelve feet by fifteen, with a couple of closets smaller and closer than the staterooms of a ship, divided off from the main room and each other by rough wooden partitions, in which the inhabitants sleep. They have almost all of them a rude bedstead, with the gray moss of the forests for mattress, and filthy, pestilential-looking blankets for covering. Two families (sometimes eight and ten in number) reside in one of these huts, which are mere wooden frames pinned, as it were, to the earth by a brick chimney outside, whose enormous aperture within pours down a flood of air, but little counteracted by the miserable spark of fire, which hardly sends an attenuated thread of lingering smoke up its huge throat. A wide ditch runs immediately at the back of these dwellings, which is filled and emptied daily by the tide.

Attached to each hovel is a small scrap of ground for a garden, which, however, is for the most part untended

and uncultivated. Such of these dwellings as I visited today were filthy and wretched in the extreme, and exhibited that most deplorable consequence of ignorance and an abject condition, the inability of the inhabitants to secure and improve even such pitiful comfort as might yet be achieved by them. Instead of the order, neatness, and ingenuity which might convert even these miserable hovels into tolerable residences, there was the careless, reckless, filthy indolence which even the brutes do not exhibit in their lairs and nests, and which seemed incapable of applying to the uses of existence the few miserable means of comfort yet within their reach. Firewood and shavings lay littered about the floors, while the half-naked children were cowering around two or three smouldering cinders. The moss with which the chinks and crannies of their ill-protected dwellings might have been stuffed was trailing in dirt and dust about the ground, while the back of the huts, opening upon a most unsightly ditch, was left wide open for the fowls and ducks, which they are allowed to raise, to travel in and out, increasing the filth of the cabin by what they brought and left in every direction.

In the midst of the floor, or squatting round the cold hearth, would be four or five little children from four to ten years old, the latter all with babies in their arms, the care of the infants being taken from the mothers (who are driven afield as soon as they recover from child labor), and devolved upon these poor little nurses, as they are called, whose business it is to watch the infant, and carry it to its mother whenever it may require nourishment. To these hardly human little beings I addressed my remonstrances about the filth, cold, and unnecessary wretchedness of their room, bidding the elder boys and girls kindle up the fire, sweep the floor, and expel the poultry. For a long time my very words seemed unintelligible to them, till, when I began to sweep and make up the fire, etc., they first fell to laughing, and then imitating me . . .

The Enforcement of Authority

At the upper end of the row of houses, and nearest to our overseer's residence, is the hut of the head driver. Let me explain, by the way, his office. The Negroes, as I before told you, are divided into troops or gangs, as they are called; at the head of each gang is a driver, who stands over them, whip in hand, while they perform their daily task, who renders an account of each individual slave and his work every evening to the overseer, and receives from him directions for their next day's tasks. Each driver is allowed to inflict a dozen lashes upon any refractory slave in the field, and at the time of the offense; they may not, however, extend the chastisement, and if it is found ineffectual, their remedy lies in reporting the unmanageable individual either to the head driver or the overseer, the former of whom has power to inflict three dozen lashes at his own discretion, and the latter as many as he himself sees fit, within the number of fifty; which limit, however, I must tell you, is an arbitrary one on this plantation, appointed by the founder of the estate, Major _____, Mr. _____'s grandfather, many of whose regulations are still observed in the government of the plantation.

Limits of this sort, however, to the power of either driver, head driver, or overseer, may or may not exist elsewhere; they are, to a certain degree, a check upon the power of these individuals; but in the absence of the master, the overseer may confine himself within the limit or not, as he chooses; and as for the master himself, where is his limit? He may, if he likes, flog a slave to death, for the laws which pretend that he may not are a mere pretense, inasmuch as the testimony of a Black is never taken against a white; and upon this plantation of ours, and a thousand more, the overseer is the *only* white man, so whence should come the testimony to any crime of his? With regard to the oft-repeated statement that it

is not the owner's interest to destroy his human property, it answers nothing; the instances in which men, to gratify the immediate impulse of passion, sacrifice not only their eternal, but their evident, palpable, positive worldly interest, are infinite. Nothing is commoner than for a man under the transient influence of anger to disregard his worldly advantage; and the black slave, whose preservation is indeed supposed to be his owner's interest, may be, will be, and is occasionally sacrificed to the blind impulse of passion. . . .

Interview With a Slave Woman

Another of my visitors had a still more dismal story to tell; her name was Die; she had had sixteen children, fourteen of whom were dead; she had had four miscarriages: one had been caused with falling down with a very heavy burden on her head, and one from having her arms strained up to be lashed. I asked her what she meant by having her arms tied up. She said their hands were first tied together, sometimes by the wrists, and sometimes, which was worse, by the thumbs, and they were then drawn up to a tree or post, so as almost to swing them off the ground, and then their clothes rolled round their waist, and a man with a cowhide stands and stripes them. I give you the woman's words. She did not speak of this as of anything strange, unusual, or especially horrid and abominable; and when I said, "Did they do that to you when you were with child?" she simply replied, "Yes, missis."

"American Slavery As It Is"

(1839)

One of the most telling anti-slavery volumes produced in the United States was entitled American Slavery As It Is. It was published by the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1839; its title page carried no author's name, but it was written by Theodore

D. Weld. The anonymity in this connection was typical of the very great modesty of Weld (1803-1895), a feature which helped to obscure - until recently - his eminent contributions to the anti-slavery crusade. Born in Connecticut, and educated in upstate New York, Weld was converted to Abolitionism by 1830 and thereafter devoted all his labors to that cause. He was a leader of the Lane Seminary movement against slavery and trained many Abolitionist agitators and agents. His labors in research and organization were fruitful, not the least of his productions was the above-mentioned book. It contained 210 closely printed, double-column pages of facts demonstrating the brutal realities of Negro slavery in the United States. Most of the data came from Southern sources: newspapers, letters, court records, etc. Its results were far-reaching; among other things, it served as a basic source of reference for Harriet Beecher Stowe in writing Uncle Tom's Cabin. Here are a few selections from American Slavery As It Is.

Reader, you are empaneled as a juror to try a plain case and bring in an honest verdict. The question at issue is not one of law, but of fact - "What is the actual condition of slaves in the United States?"

A plainer case never went to a jury. Look at it. TWENTY-SEVEN HUNDRED THOUSAND PERSONS in this country, men, women, and children, are in SLAVERY. Is slavery, as a condition for human beings, good, bad, or indifferent?

We submit the question without argument. You have common sense, and conscience, and a human heart; pronounce upon it. You have a wife, or a husband, a child, a father, a mother, a brother or a sister - make the case your own, make it theirs, and bring in your verdict.

The case of Human Rights against Slavery has been adjudicated in the court of conscience times innumerable. The same verdict has always been rendered - "Guilty"; the same sentence has always been pronounced - "Let it be accursed"; and human nature, with her million echoes,

has rung it round the world in every language under heaven. "Let it be accursed . . ."

Human beings may be inconsistent, but human *nature* is true to herself. She has uttered her testimony against slavery with a shriek ever since the monster was begotten; and till it perishes amidst the execrations of the universe, she will traverse the world on its track, dealing her bolts upon its head, and dashing against it her condemning brand.

We repeat it, every man knows that slavery is a curse. Whoever denies this, his lips libel his heart. Try him; clank the chains in his ears, and tell him they are for *him*. Give him an hour to prepare his wife and children for a life of slavery. Bid him make haste and get ready their necks for the yoke, and their wrists for the coflle chains, then look at his pale lips and trembling knees, and you have *nature's* testimony against slavery. . . .

It is no wonder that slaveholders are always talking of their *kind treatment* of their slaves. The only marvel is, that men of sense can be gulled by such professions.

When did not vice lay claim to those virtues which are the opposites of its habitual crimes? The guilty, according to their own showing, are always innocent, and cowards brave, and drunkards sober, and harlots chaste, and pickpockets honest to a fault. Everybody understands this. When a man's tongue grows thick, and he begins to hiccup and walk crosslegged, we expect him, as a matter of course, to protest that he is not drunk; so when a man is always singing the praises of his own honesty, we instinctively watch his movements and look out for our pocketbooks. Whoever is simple enough to be hoaxed by such professions, should never be trusted in the streets without somebody to take care of him. . . .

As slaveholders and their apologists are volunteer witnesses in their own cause, and are flooding the world with testimony that their slaves are kindly treated; that they are well fed, well clothed, well housed, well lodged,

moderately worked, and bountifully provided with all things needful for their comfort, we propose, first, to disprove their assertions by the testimony of a multitude of impartial witnesses, and then to put slaveholders themselves through a course of cross-questioning which will draw their condemnation out of their own mouths.

We will prove that the slaves in the United States are treated with barbarous inhumanity; that they are overworked, underfed, wretchedly clad and lodged, and have insufficient sleep; that they are often made to wear round their necks iron collars armed with prongs, to drag heavy chains and weights at their feet while working in the field, and to wear yokes, and bells, and iron horns; that they are often kept confined in the stocks day and night for weeks together, made to wear gags in their mouths for hours or days, have some of their front teeth torn out or broken off, that they may be easily detected when they run away; that they are frequently flogged with terrible severity, have red pepper rubbed into their lacerated flesh, and hot brine, spirits of turpentine, etc., poured over the gashes to increase the torture; that they are often stripped naked, their backs and limbs cut with knives, bruised and mangled by scores and hundreds of blows with the paddle, and terribly torn by the claws of cats, drawn over them by their tormentors; that they are often hunted with bloodhounds and shot down like beasts, or torn in pieces by dogs; that they are often suspended by the arms and whipped and beaten till they faint, and when revived by restoratives, beaten again till they faint, and sometimes till they die; that their ears are often cut off, their eyes knocked out, their bones broken, their flesh branded with red hot irons; that they are maimed, mutilated and burned to death over slow fires. All these things – and more, and worse – we shall *prove*.

Reader, we know whereof we affirm, we have weighed it well; *more and worse* WE WILL PROVE. Mark these words and read on; we will establish all these facts

by the testimony of scores and hundreds of eyewitnesses, by the testimony of *slaveholders* in all parts of the slave state, by slaveholding members of Congress and of state legislatures, by ambassadors to foreign courts, by judges, by doctors of divinity, and clergymen of all denominations, by merchants, mechanics, lawyers and physicians, by presidents and professors in colleges and professional seminaries, by planters, overseers and drivers.

We shall show, not merely that such deeds are committed, but that they are frequent; not done in corners, but before the sun; not in one of the slave states, but in all of them; not perpetrated by brutal overseers and drivers merely, but by magistrates, by legislators, by professors of religion, by preachers of the gospel, by governors of states, by "gentlemen of property and standing," and by delicate females moving in the "highest circles of society."

We know, full well, the outcry that will be made by multitudes at these declarations: the multiform cavils, the flat denials, the charges of "exaggeration" and "falsehood" so often bandied, the sneers of affected contempt at the credulity that can believe such things, and the rage and imprecations against those who give them currency. We know, too, the threadbare sophistries by which slaveholders and their apologists seek to evade such testimony. If they admit that such deeds are committed, they tell us that they are exceedingly rare, and therefore furnish no grounds for judging of the general treatment of slaves; that occasionally a brutal wretch in the *free* states barbarously butchers his wife, but that no one thinks of inferring from that, the general treatment of wives at the North and West.

They tell us, also, that the slaveholders of the South are proverbially hospitable, kind, and generous, and it is incredible that they can perpetrate such enormities upon human beings; further, that it is absurd to suppose that they would thus injure their own property, that self-

interest would prompt them to treat their slaves with kindness, as none but fools and madmen wantonly destroy their own property; further, that Northern visitors at the South come back testifying to the kind treatment of the slaves, and that the slaves themselves corroborate such representations. All these pleas, and scores of others, are bruited in every corner of the free States; and who that hath eyes to see, has not sickened at the blindness that saw not, at the palsy of heart that felt not, or at the cowardice and sycophancy that dared not expose such shallow fallacies. We are not to be turned from our purpose by such vapid babblings. In their appropriate places, we propose to consider these objections and various others, and to show their emptiness and folly.

Wendell Phillips at World Anti-Slavery Convention

(1840)

"The Right Arm of Our Enterprise"

Since the slave trade and slavery itself had involved all the great European powers and the United States, the struggle to terminate and prohibit both institutions was world-wide. The Abolitionist movement in the United States gained inspiration and support from analogous efforts in Europe and in Latin America; and the latter were encouraged by every advance achieved in the United States.

As a result, international cooperation among Abolitionists was common. One of the most notable instances of such conduct was the World Anti-Slavery Convention held in London in June 1840. Five hundred delegates were present, including many from the United States. Among the latter were several women, including Maria W. Chapman, Ann Phillips (wife of Wendell Phillips), Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton who were among the most effective leaders of the American anti-slavery effort. Within that

effort the question of public participation by women had been debated for years. By 1840 women were a decisive part of the struggle and from their work in the field of Negro liberation they developed organized efforts on behalf of women's rights and emancipation.

When, therefore, the British proposed the banning of women as delegates and insisted that they be confined to the galleries as spectators, most of the male membership of the American delegation protested bitterly. Wendell Phillips introduced a motion which would have included the women as full delegates in the Convention. After heated debate, this motion was defeated and several of the American men, including Phillips and Garrison, joined the women in the galleries as spectators, refusing to participate in a Convention reflecting male-superiority prejudices. Printed below is the excerpt from the argument* tendered by Wendell Phillips in support of his motion. It may be added that discussions among the women, after this experience, resulted in the decision of several - particularly Mrs. Mott and Mrs. Stanton - to hold a women's rights convention in the United States. What materialized was the first Women's Rights Convention, held in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848.

It is the custom there in America not to admit colored men into respectable society; and we have been told again and again that we are outraging the decencies of humanity when we permit colored men to sit by our side. When we have submitted to brickbats and the tar-tub and feathers in New England rather than yield to the custom prevalent there of not admitting colored brethren into our friendship, shall we yield to parallel custom or prejudice against women in Old England?

We cannot yield this question if we would, for it is a matter of conscience. But we would not yield it on the

* Source: Oscar Sherwin, *Prophet of Liberty: The Life and Times of Wendell Phillips* (N. Y., 1958), pp. 112-13.

ground of expediency. In doing so, we should feel that we were striking off the right arm of our enterprise. . . . We have argued it over and over again, and decided it time after time, in every society in the land, in favor of the women. We have not changed by crossing the water. We stand here the advocates of the same principle that we contend for in America . . .

Massachusetts cannot turn aside to succumb to any prejudices or customs, even in the land she looks upon with so much reverence as the land of [William] Wilberforce, of [Thomas] Clarkson, and of [Daniel] O'Connell. It is a matter of conscience, and British virtue ought not to ask us to yield.

John Quincy Adams on Nullification and Slavery

(September, 1842)

As the nineteenth century moved on, the hold of slave power upon the Federal Government increased. At the same time, classes and forces grew in the nation as a whole, and especially in the northern cities and the western farm-areas, which sharply conflicted with the interests of the slave-owners. Hence, a bitter struggle grew between these forces which manifested itself especially in the Congress. By the 1840's no less a giant than John Quincy Adams of Massachusetts – son of a President and himself a former President – was waging a determined battle in the House of Representatives against the political domination of the slave-owners. The battle centered around the right of petition – with Adams being advised daily by the Abolitionist leader, Theodore Weld. The House was ready to censure Adams, but Old Man Eloquent finally forced it to surrender. In the midst of the crisis, certain slaveocratic theoreticians, led by Calhoun, urged the theory of nullification of the right to petition as both a justification of their tactics and a threat. Quincy Adams dis-

cussed nullification and slavery at great length in an Address to Constituents issued in September, 1842. Brief extracts from this important document follow.*

Nullification was generated in the hotbed of slavery. It drew its first breath in the land where the meaning of the word democracy is that a majority of the people are the goods and chattels of the minority; that more than one half of the people are not men, women, and children, but things, to be treated by their owners, not exactly like dogs and horses, but like tables, chairs . . . That is the native land of nullification, and it is a theory of constitutional law worthy of its origin.

Democracy, pure democracy, has at least foundation in a generous theory of human rights. It is founded on the natural equality of mankind. It is the corner stone of the Christian religion. It is the first *element* of *all* lawful government upon earth. Democracy is self-government of the community by the conjoint will of the majority of members. What communion, what affinity, can there be between that principle and nullification, which is the despotism of a corporation — unlimited, unrestrained, *sovereign* power? Never, never was amalgamation so preposterous and absurd as that of nullification and democracy. . . .

The utter and unqualified inconsistency of slavery, in any of its forms, with the principles of the North American Revolution, and the Declaration of our Independence, had so forcibly struck the Southern champions of our rights that the abolition of slavery and the emancipation of the slaves was a darling project of Thomas Jefferson . . . But the associated wealth of the slaveholders

* Source: A. Koch and W. Peden, eds., *The Selected Writings of John and John Quincy Adams* (N. Y., 1946), pp. 391-95.

outweighed the principles of the Revolution, and by the Constitution of the United States a compromise was established between slavery and freedom.

The extent of the sacrifice of principle made by the North in this compromise can be estimated only by its practical effects. The principle is that the House of Representatives of the United States is a representation only of the persons; and freedom of the North, and of the persons, property, and slavery of the South. Its practical operation has been to give the balance of power in the House, and in every department of the Government, into the minority of numbers. For practical results look to the present composition of your government in all its departments. The President of the United States, the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House, are all slaveholders. The Chief Justice and four out of the nine Judges of the Supreme Court of the United States are slaveholders. The Commander-in-Chief of your army and the general next in command are slaveholders. A vast majority of all the officers of your navy, from the highest to the lowest, are slaveholders. Of six heads of the executive departments, three are slaveholders; securing thus, with the President, a majority in all Cabinet consultations and executive councils

With such consequences staring us in the face, what are we to think when we are told that the Government of the United States is a democracy of numbers – a government by a majority of the people? . . .

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1842)

"There Is A Samson In This Land"

The most popular of all American poets was Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1881). Unlike Whittier's, Longfellow's family was wealthy; he was educated in private schools and at Bowdoin College, and studied languages and literature in Europe. On his return he served as a professor at Bowdoin and then at Harvard. After 1854, he gave up teaching and devoted himself entirely to writing. His "Evangeline," "The Village Blacksmith," "The Wreck of the Hesperus," and many other poems are part of the American consciousness. Less well known are the poems Longfellow wrote expressing his hatred of slavery and war. An example of the former is his 1842 poem, "The Warning."

Beware! The Israelite of old, who tore
The lion in his path, when, poor and blind,
He saw the blessed light of heaven no more,
Shorn of his noble strength and forced to grind
In prison, and at last led forth to be
A pander to Philistine revelry, -

Upon the pillars of the temple laid
His desperate hands, and in its overthrow
Destroyed himself, and with him those who made
A cruel mockery of his sightless woe;
The poor, blind Slave, the scoff and jest of all,
Expired, and thousands perished in the fall!

There is a poor, blind Samson in this land,
Shorn of his strength, and bound in bonds of steel,
Who may, in some grim revel, raise his hand,
And shake the pillars of this Commonweal,
Till the vast Temple of our liberties
A shapeless mass of wreck and rubbish lies.

A Public Call for Rebellion

(1843)

From August 21 to August 24 1843, a National Negro Convention was held in Buffalo, New York. Over seventy delegates from a dozen states were present, including such young and rising figures as Frederick Douglass, William Wells Brown, Charles B. Ray, Charles L. Remond, and Henry Highland Garnet. The latter, though but 27 years old, had already served as editor of a newspaper and was then the pastor of a Presbyterian Church in Troy, New York. His militant speech at this Convention, "An Address to the Slaves of the United States," attracted national attention. Its outright call for armed rebellion was held to be excessive by the Convention, though it was rejected by only one vote. The concluding section of this Address follows.

Fellow men! Patient sufferers! Behold your dearest rights crushed to the earth! See your sons murdered, and your wives, mothers and sisters doomed to prostitution. In the name of the merciful God, and by all that life is worth, let it no longer be a debatable question whether it is better to choose *Liberty or Death*.

[There follow several paragraphs in which Garnet calls to mind the heroic efforts of Negro rebel leaders, on land and aboard slave ships – as Denmark Vesey in South Carolina in 1822, Nat Turner in Virginia in 1831, Joseph Cinque aboard the Amistad in 1839, Madison Washington, aboard the Creole in 1841; he then continued:]

Brethren, arise, arise! Strike for your lives and liberties. Now is the day and the hour. Let every slave throughout the land do this, and the days of slavery are numbered. You cannot be more oppressed than you have been – you cannot suffer greater cruelties than you have already. *Rather die freemen than live to be slaves.* Remember that you are **FOUR MILLIONS!**

It is in your power so to torment the God-cursed slaveholders that they will be glad to let you go free. If the scale was turned, and Black men were the masters and white men the slaves, every destructive agent and element would be employed to lay the oppressor low. Danger and death would hang over their heads day and night. . . . In the name of God, we ask, are you men? Where is the blood of your fathers? Has it all run out of your veins? Awake, awake; millions of voices are calling you! Your dead fathers speak to you from their graves. Heaven, as with a voice of thunder, calls on you to arise from the dust.

Let your motto be resistance! *resistance!* RESISTANCE! No oppressed people have ever secured their liberty without resistance. What kind of resistance you had better make, you must decide by the circumstances that surround you, and according to the suggestion of expediency. Brethren, adieu! Trust in the living God. Labor for the peace of the human race, and remember that you are FOUR MILLIONS.

William Jay: Negro Slavery – (1843–1845) and the White Man's Freedom

In order to preserve the institution of Negro slavery, it became more and more necessary for the rulers to curb the liberties of the white people. First and fullest evidence of this occurred in the South; but by the 1830's the vitiation of the liberties of the whites living elsewhere in the United States was well under way. This point was sharply and succinctly made by William Jay in 1843 in the sentences that follow. William Jay (1789–1850) was the son of John Jay, Revolutionary patriot and first Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court: He was himself a judge of the Westchester County Court in New York (1818–1843), a strong Abolitionist and a pioneer in the struggle against war.

"Politicians Are Selling Our Constitution" (1843)

We commenced the present struggle to obtain the freedom of the slave; we are compelled to continue it to preserve our own. We are now contending, not so much with the slaveholders of the South about human rights, as with the political and commercial aristocracy of the North for the liberty of speech, of the press, and of the conscience. And politicians are selling our Constitution and laws for Southern votes. Our great capitalists are speculating, not merely in land and banks, but in the liberties of the people. We are called upon to contemplate a spectacle never, I believe, before witnessed – the wealthy portion of the country striving to introduce anarchy and violence on a calculation of profit; making merchandise of peace and good order!

"Truth Ceases To Be A Virtue"

(1845)

A point somewhat similar to that made by William Jay was developed two years later by Cassius M. Clay of Kentucky, in the True American, an anti-slavery newspaper that he then published in Lexington. Clay (1810–1903) was one of the numerous Southern white opponents of slavery who battled with great courage to eliminate the scourge from their own region. In 1849 he ran on an anti-slavery platform for Governor of Kentucky; he continued thereafter to denounce slavery in the columns of newspapers he issued from Louisville, Kentucky and Cincinnati, Ohio. Clay served twice as U.S. Minister to Russia (1861–1862, 1863 to 1869) and also, briefly, as a major general in the Union Army.

The most lamentable evil of slavery is the practical loss of the liberty of speech and of the press. The timid are overawed by the threatening array of physical force; the conscientious, who are naturally lovers of peace and good will, sink under bitter hate, and increasing persecution; the ambitious and spirited are overwhelmed by

the unsupportable anticipation of sudden proscription, certain obscurity, and eternal oblivion. Thus truth ceases to be a virtue, and hypocrisy a crime; most severe of retribution is the violation of nature's laws; the limbs of the apparent slave are fettered with iron, but the living and immortal spirit of the master wears heavier, more insufferable chains!

"The Masses Will Be Avenged" (1845)

Clay's True American lasted only a few months in Lexington; the men of property forced its closing by dismantling its presses and shipping them to Cincinnati. The specific catalyst setting off this violent and altogether illegal action was an editorial which Clay published in his newspaper on August 12 1845, the key paragraph of which reads as follows.

But remember, you who dwell in marble palaces – that there are strong arms and fiery hearts, and iron pikes in the streets, and panes of glass only between them and the silver plate on the board and smooth-skin woman on the ottoman – when you have mocked at virtue and denied the agency of God in the affairs of men and made rapine your honeyed faith; tremble for the day of retribution is at hand – and *the masses will be avenged.*

The Ruffner Pamphlet (1847) from Virginia

"A Country of Slaves Was Not For Them"

A deep anti-slavery feeling persisted among the white population of the Border States, though its public expression became rare as the Civil War neared. One of the striking instances of the expression of such opinion – abeit its first publication was issued

anonymously – was the so-called "Ruffner pamphlet." This was the text of a talk given in the course of a debate before a literary society of Lexington, Virginia (now West Virginia) in 1847. The author was Henry Ruffner, an owner of slaves and a teacher at Washington College in Lexington. The emphasis in the argument was on the economic disabilities slavery visited upon an area when contrasted with the greater productivity possible through the use of free labor. In this it presaged a more famous work, The Impending Crisis, to be published ten years later by another Border State citizen, the North Carolinian, Hinton R. Helper. It is of some importance that both Ruffner and Helper were of German origin, for it is a fact that German-derived settlers in the South tended quite often to be hostile to slavery.

The "Ruffner pamphlet," later republished in Louisville, Kentucky, was widely read in the Border States and exerted considerable influence upon public thinking. Characteristic sections from this work follow.

Nowhere, since time began, have the two systems of slave labor and free labor, been subjected to so fair and so decisive a trial of their effects on public prosperity, as in these United States. Here the two systems have worked side by side for ages, under such equal circumstances both political and physical, and with such ample time and opportunity for each to work out its proper effects, that all must admit the experiment to be now complete, and the result decisive. No man of common sense, who has observed this result, can doubt for a moment, that the system of free labor promotes the growth and prosperity of States, in a much higher degree than the system of slave labor. In the first settlement of a country, when labor is scarce and dear, slavery may give a temporary impulse to improvement: but even this is not the case, except in warm climates, and where free men are scarce and either sickly or lazy: and when we have said this,

we have said all experience in the United States warrants us to say, in favor of employing slave labor.

It is the common remark of all who have traveled through the United States, that the free States and the slave States, exhibit a striking contrast in their appearance. In the older free States are seen all the tokens of prosperity: a dense and increasing population; thriving villages, towns, and cities; a neat and productive agriculture, growing manufactures and active commerce.

In the older parts of the slave States – with a few local exceptions – are seen, on the contrary, too evident signs of stagnation and positive decay: a sparse population; a slovenly cultivation spread over vast fields, that are wearing out, among others already worn out and desolate. Villages and towns, “few and far between,” rarely growing, often decaying, sometimes mere remnants of what they were, sometimes deserted ruins, haunted only by owls; generally no manufactures, nor even trades, except the indispensable few; commerce and navigation abandoned, as far as possible to the people of the free States; and generally, instead of the stir and bustle of industry, a dull and dreamy stillness, broken, if broken at all, only by the wordy brawl of politics . . .

Fellow citizens, we esteem it a sad, a humiliating fact, which should penetrate the heart of every Virginian, that from the year 1790 to the present, Virginia has lost more people by emigration than all the old free States together. Up to 1840, when the last census was taken, she had lost more by nearly 300 000. She has sent – or we should rather say, she has driven from her soil – at least one third of all the emigrants, who have gone from the old States to the new. More than a third have gone from the other old slave States. Many of these multitudes who have left the slave States, have shunned the regions of slavery, and settled in the free countries of the West. These were generally industrious and enterprising white men, who found by sad experience, that a country of

slaves was not the country for them. It is a truth, a certain truth, that *slavery drives free laborers – farmers, mechanics, and all, and some of the best of them too – out of the country, and fills their places with Negroes.*

What is it but slavery that makes Marylanders, Carolinians, and especially old Virginians and new Virginians fly their country at such a rate? Some go because they dislike slavery and desire to get away from it; others, because they have gloomy forebodings of what is to befall the slave States, and wish to leave their families in a country of happier prospects; others because they cannot get profitable employment among slaveholders; others, industrious and high-spirited workingmen, will not stay in a country where slavery degrades the workingman. Others go because they see that their country, for some reason, does not prosper, and that other countries, not far off, are prospering, and will afford better hopes of prosperity to themselves; others, a numerous class, who are slaveholders and cannot live without slaves, finding that they cannot live longer with them on their worn-out soils, go to seek better lands and more profitable crops, where slave labor may yet for a while enable them and their children to live.

Walt Whitman on Slavery

(1847)

“American Workingmen *Versus* Slavery”

The greatest poet so far produced in the United States was Walt Whitman (1819–1892). Born in Long Island, and residing for many years in Brooklyn, New York, Whitman worked as a printer and a carpenter, and as an editor of several newspapers, particularly the Brooklyn Daily Eagle. He was poor his entire life, and managed with difficulty to pay for the publication of his own first edition (1855) of the immortal collection, Leaves of Grass.

He lived in the South for some time. During the Civil War, his brother was wounded. Whitman, after nursing him, stayed on with the Union troops as a nurse and saw the Civil War at first hand. During and just after that conflict he wrote his greatest poetry.

Whitman's views were intensely democratic and humanistic, and he loathed the institution of Negro slavery, attacking it strongly as a prose writer – and especially as a newspaper editor. His penetrating, class-oriented and very militant editorial, whose title is given above, appeared in the Brooklyn Daily Eagle September 1 1847. It was written during the War against Mexico, an aggressive, pro-slavery expansionistic assault on the part of the United States. In August, 1847 the Mexicans, having fought for about 16 months, tentatively accepted an armistice. But its insulting provisions forced Mexico to reject it and she resumed fighting until September 14 1847, when Mexico City was captured. This is the setting for Whitman's editorial.

The question whether or not there shall be slavery in the new territories which it seems conceded on all hands we are largely to get through this Mexican War*, is a question between *the grand body of white workingmen, the millions of mechanics, farmers, and operatives of our country*, with their interests, on the one side – and the interests of the few thousand rich, “polished,” and aristocratic owners of slaves at the South, on the other side. Experience has proved (and the evidence is to be seen now by any one who will look at it) that a stalwart mass of respectable workingmen cannot exist, much less flourish, in a thorough slave state. Let any one think for a moment what a different appearance New York, Pennsylvania, or Ohio would present – how much less sturdy

* As a direct result of the war, the United States confirmed its title to Texas, and acquired much of the vast area between the Rocky Mountains and the Pacific Ocean.

independence and family happiness there would be – were slaves the workmen there, instead of each man as a general thing being his own workman . . .

The influence of the slave institution is to bring the dignity of labor down to the level of slavery, which, God knows! is low enough. And this it is which must induce *the workingmen of the north, east, and west, to come up, to a man, in defense of their rights, their honor, and that heritage of getting bread by the sweat of the brow, which we must leave to our children.* Let them utter forth, then, in tones as massive as becomes their stupendous cause, that their calling shall *not* be sunk to the miserable level of what is little above brutishness – sunk to be like owned goods, and driven cattle! . . .

There can be no halfway work in the matter of slavery in the new territory; we must either have it there, or have it not . . . The truth is that all practice and theory . . . are strongly arrayed in favor of limiting slavery to where it already exists. For this the clear eye of Washington looked longingly; for this the great voice of Jefferson plead, and his sacred fingers wrote; for this were uttered the prayers of Franklin and Madison and Monroe.

But now, in the South, stands a little band, strong in chivalry, refinement, and genius – headed by a sort of intellectual Saladin [i.e., Calhoun] assuming to speak in behalf of sovereign states, while in reality they utter their own idle theories; and disdainfully crying out against the rest of the republic, for whom their contempt is but illy concealed. The courage and high tone of these men are points in their favor, it must be confessed. With dextrous but brazen logic they profess to stand on the constitution against a principle whose very existence dates from some of the most revered formers of that constitution!

And these – this band, really little in numbers, and which could be annihilated by one pulsation of the stout free heart of the north – these are the men who are

making such insolent demands, in the face of the working farmers and mechanics of the free states – the nine tenths of the population of the republic. We admire the chivalric bearing (sometimes a sort of impudence) of these men. So we admire, as it is told in history, the dauntless conduct of kings and nobles when arraigned for punishment before an outraged and a too long-suffering people . . . But the course of moral light and human freedom (and their consequent happiness), is not to be stayed by such men as they. Thousands of noble hearts at the north – the entire east, the uprousing giant of the free west – will surely, when the time comes, sweep over them and their doctrines as the advancing ocean tide obliterates the channel of some little brook that erewhile ran down the sands of its shore. Already the roar of the waters is heard; and if a few short-sighted ones seek to withstand it, the surge, terrible in its fury, will sweep them too in the ruin.

Frederick Douglass: First Number of “The North Star”

(December, 1847)

The most influential of the Negro newspapers launched prior to the Civil War was that edited by Frederick Douglass – with Martin R. Delany as coeditor – called The North Star. It was issued in Rochester, New York, and its first number appeared December 3 1847. The paper was a further evidence of the great courage and ability of its editor.

Two editorials from this first number follow. The first was addressed to Negroes in particular; the second to Abolitionists in general. Both of them reflect the eloquence with which Douglass pleaded his cause at all times – whether in his writings, or in his hundreds of addresses.

I

We solemnly dedicate *The North Star* to the cause of our long oppressed and plundered fellow countrymen. May God bless the undertaking to your good! It shall fearlessly assert your rights, faithfully proclaim your wrongs, and earnestly demand for you instant and even-handed justice. Giving no quarter to slavery at the South, it will hold no truce with oppressors at the North. While it shall boldly advocate emancipation for our enslaved brethren, it will omit no opportunity to gain for the nominally free complete enfranchisement. Every effort to injure or degrade you or your cause – originating where-soever, or with whomsoever – shall find in it a constant, unswerving and inflexible foe . . .

Remember that we are one, that our cause is one, and that we must help each other, if we would succeed. We have drank to the dregs the bitter cup of slavery; we have worn the heavy yoke; we have sighed beneath our bonds, and writhed beneath the bloody lash; cruel mementoes of our oneness are indelibly marked on our living flesh. We are one with you under the ban of prejudice and proscription – one with you under the slander of inferiority – one with you in social and political disfranchisement. What you suffer, we suffer; what you endure, we endure. We are indissolubly united, and must fall or flourish together . . .

II

It is scarcely necessary for us to say that our desire to occupy our present position at the head of an Anti-Slavery Journal, has resulted from no unworthy distrust or ungrateful want of appreciation of the zeal, integrity, or ability of the noble band of white laborers in this department of our cause; but, from the sincere and settled conviction that such a Journal, if conducted with only

moderate skill and ability, would do a most important and indispensable work, which it would be wholly impossible for our white friends to do for us.

It is neither a reflection on the fidelity, nor a disparagement of the ability of our friends and fellow laborers, to assert what "common sense affirms and only folly denies," that the man who has *suffered the wrong* is the man to *demand redress* – that the man STRUCK is the man to CRY OUT – and that he who has *endured the cruel pangs of Slavery* is the man to *advocate Liberty*. It is evident we must be our own representatives and advocates, not exclusively, but peculiarly – not distinct from, but in connection with our white friends. In the grand struggle for liberty and equality now waging, it is meet, right and essential that there should arise on our ranks authors and editors, as well as orators, for it is in these capacities that the most permanent good can be rendered to our cause . . .

"No Right to Exclude Colored Children"

(1849)

Slavery was the form and essence of the Negro's special oppression; hence it properly constituted the central target of those battling against that oppression. This in turn developed subordinate and derivative institutions which were of great importance in helping to sustain the main edifice and were, in themselves, fearful burdens. The policy of discrimination and segregation practiced against all Negroes, including those who were free (and in 1860 there were 500 000 free Negroes in the nation, half of them south and half north of the Mason-Dixon line) was the main derivative form of exploitation. Throughout the pre-Civil War North, for most of the period, Negroes were discriminated against severely: Means of public transportation were Jim-Crow; marriage laws were racist; the suffrage was discri-

minatory; eating places and resorts banned Negroes generally; the public schools either excluded Negro children altogether or relegated them to separate and inferior schools.

As other documents in this volume show, all this was protested against persistently by the Negro masses themselves. The Abolitionist movement as a whole – as the Constitution of the American Anti-Slavery Society stated – had as its aims not only the ending of slavery, but also the destruction of segregation. Many whites, therefore, did protest against discrimination; an outstanding example of this forms the next document.*

The public schools of Boston were Jim-Crow until 1855 when, as the result of prolonged struggle, they were integrated. Part of that struggle was a petition numerously signed by Negro citizens of that city. The petition was presented in 1849 to the School Board of the City. The Board appointed a Committee to guide its ruling. The Committee's report was adverse to the Negroes' petition. One member of the Boston School Board filed a vigorous and closely argued dissent from the Committee's finding. He was Charles Theodore Russell (1815–1896). The question of integrated schools and Russell's argument have the greatest interest for today when current newspaper headlines declare the determination of the Negro people and their white allies to end Jim-Crow education in the United States.

Charles Russell was the son of a State Senator. He was a lawyer of eminence who held many positions of public trust, one of them being his membership on the School Board of Boston. The following presents the essence of his protest of August 29 1849.

The Undersigned believes that we have no moral or legal right to exclude the colored children from the ordinary public schools of this City . . .

The Undersigned is led to this conclusion by considerations founded in the origin, the nature, and the

* Source: Irving Mark & E. L. Schwaab, eds., *The Faith of Our Fathers* (N. Y., 1952), pp. 154–56.

design of our system of public education. It is believed that the right claimed by those who would exclude the Blacks, cannot be maintained, consistently without eradicating the vital principle, upon which our *common public* schools rest . . .

Their great distinctive feature has been and is, that they are supported by, designed for, and open to the whole public equally. Every citizen must, according to his means, contribute to their support. Every citizen has an equal voice in their establishment, maintenance and control. Every man and woman in the Commonwealth is equally eligible to become their teachers.

The children of the rich and the poor, the strong and the weak, the influential and the obscure, after they pass the wide open door of these schools, stand upon a common level, in the presence of the Great Father of them all.

Their design seems to be, and their whole influence is, practically to teach the great theoretical principle of our Government, that "all men are born free and equal." Nowhere, out of the church of God, is this great doctrine more perfectly recognized than in our common schools. These highways of knowledge, like the highways of communication, are established and maintained by all, and of course for all, and to be restricted in their use by no regulations, save those that apply to all.

Equality is the vital principle of the system. Destroy this in the free schools, and you not only destroy these schools, but the government which rests upon them, as one of its main supports. No matter how few are to be favorably or unfavorably affected by the particular manner in which you war against this principle of equality in a given case, the general result must be pernicious, and only pernicious. It is war upon the *common public* school system.

Now what is the result of this principle of equality? Why, that no child in the Commonwealth can have any superior right over any other child to participate in the

benefits of the common school. Nor has any class of children the right to different and separate schools, from any other class of similar age and general character. Religious differences may not intrude into the common schools . . . Political differences are barred out from their doors . . . The rich and the poor must sit upon the same form, yield to the same discipline and participate equally in the struggle for the same honors. Birth and origin are as impotent as social condition and standing. The child of the foreigner, and the native citizen, may equally share in this common blessing. Although the unnaturalized foreigner can neither hold office, nor land, among us, and has no voice in our Government, still his children are, and should be, entitled to all the privileges of our common schools . . . If then the colored child may be excluded from the schools, it must be upon some legal distinction, superior to any of the distinctions here named.

What is this distinctive mark? *Color*, and *color* alone. Passing over the question of the degree of color necessary to create the distinction, and the difficulty of settling this; waiving the consideration of the inquiry whether color creates a moral distinction, affecting the right to be instructed, in children of a common Father, and descended from a common ancestor, it is enough for us to ask whether the laws of this Commonwealth recognize a distinction so founded. We find no warrant for it. There is not a colored citizen of the Commonwealth who is not as eligible to the office of Governor, or any subordinate civil office as the present chief magistrate. There is not a colored citizen in the State, who may not be elected, if the people choose to elect him, to the places we fill at this Board . . . There is not one who is not as eligible to any civil office in the gift of the appointing power of the States, as any white citizen. In point of fact, two or three colored men have been admitted, and are practicing law at the Suffolk bar. Some or all of them hold commissions as Justices of the Peace.

The colored citizen has no exemption from taxation. He is entitled equally with the white to vote at the polls. He is thus called upon to discharge the duties and share in the honors of the citizen. Hence he would seem to be entitled to enjoy equally all the public means provided to qualify him for such duties, and enable him to attain to such distinctions. In all the honors and pursuits of life, in this Commonwealth, in the sovereignty itself, the Black man shares equally with the white. With what pretense, then, can it be urged that he may be excluded from the schools, on account of his color? In Massachusetts at least, *in law*, the complexion gives no rights and creates no disabilities . . .

There is another consideration, which has no little influence with the Undersigned. The exclusion of the colored people from the schools has undoubtedly proceeded from prejudices, growing out of their oppressed and enslaved condition. Its effect, also, has been to foster the opinion that they are an inferior and degraded race, incapable of any thing, but to do the drudgeries of life, under the instigation of the lash. From this opinion, human slavery draws its most specious argument. And the free and philanthropic North is cited to prove the opinion well founded. Every mode of degradation put upon the Blacks here, is cited elsewhere in support of slavery, and contributes to sustain it. And so desirable is it forever to destroy that system of iniquity and oppression, that I should deem it some redemption of error, even, if it leaned against it. But when this consideration is combined with those of justice and equity, and all tend to the same conclusion, it becomes irresistibly strong . . .

William H. Seward

(1850)

"Higher Law" Speech

After the War against Mexico and the territorial prizes resulting therefrom, the question of the organization of such territory once again threw Congress into extended and bitter debate. Argumentation revolved around the so-called Compromise of 1850 formulated basically by Henry Clay of Kentucky. Clay's "compromise" would have permitted slavery in such territory, with the exception of California which was to be free. It pledged non-interference with slavery in the District of Columbia; a stricter fugitive slave law; the affirmation that Congress had no authority to interfere in the interstate slave trade; and the prohibition of the slave trade in the District of Columbia itself.

Clay's proposals were adopted substantially by Congress in laws enacted August and September, 1850; but this was done only after tremendous resistance in and outside of Congress. One of the leaders of the resistance within Congress was William H. Seward (1801-1872) then a Senator representing New York. Seward, born in upstate New York, became a prominent lawyer, Governor of the State, and Senator after 1848. He subsequently became a founder of the Republican Party and served Lincoln as Secretary of State. One of his speeches in the 1850 struggle became famous. Delivered March 11, it contained the phrase "a higher law," which was repeated, North and South, innumerable times in the ensuing years. His speech is reproduced, in part, below.

It is now avowed by the honorable Senator from South Carolina [John C. Calhoun], that nothing will satisfy the slave states but a compromise that will convince them that they can remain in the Union consistently with their honor and their safety. And what are the concessions which will have that effect? Here they are in the words of the Senator:

"The North must do justice by conceding to the South an equal right in the acquired territory, and do

her duty by causing the stipulations relative to fugitive slaves to be faithfully fulfilled – cease the agitation of the slave question, and provide for the insertion of a provision in the Constitution by an amendment, which will restore to the South in substance the power she possessed, of protecting herself, before the equilibrium between the sections was destroyed by the action of this Government.”

These terms amount to this: that the free states having already, or although they may hereafter have, majorities of population and majorities in both houses of Congress, shall concede to the slave states, being in a minority in both, the unequal advantage of an equality. That is, that we shall alter the Constitution so as to convert the Government from a national democracy, operating by a constitutional majority of voices, into a federal alliance, in which the minority shall have a veto against the majority. And this would be nothing less than to return to the original Articles of Confederation.

But there is yet another aspect in which this principle must be examined. It regards the domain only as a possession, to be enjoyed either in common or by partition by the citizens of the old states. It is true, indeed, that the national domain is ours. It is true it was acquired by the valor and with the wealth of the whole nation. But we hold, nevertheless, no arbitrary power over it. We hold no arbitrary authority over anything, whether acquired lawfully or seized by usurpation. The Constitution regulates our stewardship; the Constitution devotes the domain to union, to justice, to defense, to welfare, and to liberty.

But there is a higher law than the Constitution, which regulates our authority over the domain, and devotes it to the same noble purposes. The territory is a part, no inconsiderable part, of the common heritage of mankind,

bestowed upon them by the Creator of the universe. We are his stewards, and must so discharge our trust as to secure in the highest attainable degree their happiness. . . .

This is a state, and we are deliberating for it, just as our fathers deliberated in establishing the institutions we enjoy. Whatever superiority there is in our condition and hopes over those of any other "kingdom" or "estate" is due to the fortunate circumstance that our ancestors did not leave things to "take their chance," but that they "added amplitude and greatness" to our commonwealth "by introducing such ordinances, constitutions, and customs, as were wise." We in our turn have succeeded to the same responsibilities, and we cannot approach the duty before us wisely or justly, except we raise ourselves to the great consideration of how we can most certainly "sow greatness to our posterity and successors."

And now the simple, bold, and even awful question which presents itself to us is this: Shall we, who are founding institutions, social and political, for countless millions; shall we, who know by experience the wise and the just, and are free to choose them, and to reject the erroneous and unjust; shall we establish human bondage, or permit it by our sufferance to be established? Sir, our forefathers would not have hesitated an hour. They found slavery existing here, and they left it only because they could not remove it. There is not only no free state that would now establish it, but there is no slave state, which, if it had had the free alternative we now have, would have founded slavery. Indeed, our revolutionary predecessors had precisely the same question before them in establishing any organic law under which the states of Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, and Wisconsin have since come into the Union, and they solemnly repudiated and excluded slavery from those states forever. I confess that the most alarming evidence of our degeneracy which has yet been given is found in the fact that we even debate such a question. . . .

The next of this class of arguments is, that the inhibition of slavery in the new territories is *unnecessary*.... But why is it unnecessary? It is said, *first*, by reason of *climate*. I answer, if this be so, why do not the representatives of the slave states concede the Proviso? They deny that the climate prevents the introduction of slavery. Then I will leave nothing to a contingency. But, in truth, I think the weight of argument is against the proposition. Is there any climate where slavery has not existed? It has prevailed all over Europe, from sunny Italy to bleak England, and is existing now, stronger than in any other land, in ice-bound Russia. But it will be replied, that this is not African slavery. I rejoin, that only makes the case the stronger. If this vigorous Saxon race of ours was reduced to slavery while it retained the courage of semibarbarism in its own high northern latitude, what security does climate afford against the transplantation of the more gentle, more docile, and already enslaved and debased African to the genial climate of New Mexico and Eastern California?

Sir, there is no climate incongenial to slavery. It is true it is less productive than free labor in many northern countries. But it is no less productive than free white labor in even tropical climates. Labor is in quick demand in all new countries. Slave labor is cheaper than free labor, and it would go first into new regions; and wherever it goes it brings labor into dishonor, and therefore free white labor avoids competition with it.

Sir, I might rely on climate if I had not been born in a country where slavery existed – and this land was all of it north of the fortieth parallel of latitude; and if I did not know the struggle it has cost, and which is yet going on, to get complete relief from the institution and its baleful consequences. I desire to propound this question to those who are now in favor of dispensing with the Wilmot Proviso: Was the ordinance of 1787 necessary or not? Necessary we all agree. It has received

too many elaborate eulogiums to be now decried as an idle and superfluous thing. And yet that ordinance extended the inhibition of slavery from the thirty-seventh to the fortieth parallel of north latitude. And now we are told that the inhibition named is unnecessary anywhere north of $36^{\circ} 30'$! We are told that we may rely upon the laws of God, which prohibit slave labor north of that line, and that it is absurd to reenact the laws of God. There is no human enactment which is just that is not a reenactment of the law of God.

Theodore Parker

(1850)

"The Neutrality Is Over"

In the generation prior to 1860, there was no more influential mind on the American scene than that of the Unitarian minister, Theodore Parker (1810-1860). A poor man, he nevertheless managed to gain a Harvard education on scholarship. As a preacher he brought his message of radical inquiry to thousands every week. His lectures before lyceums carried his influence to additional tens of thousands, and his essays reached even broader circles of the American public. Friend of Emerson, Brown and Phillips, he was a leader of the transcendentalist movement, and editor of the Massachusetts Quarterly Review. A leader in prison-reform activities, his main concentration was on the struggle against slavery. Like Phillips he had a grasp of the class realities of society. Something of this comes through his analysis of "The State of the Nation" which he delivered November 28 1850.

The idea of despotism has for its allies:

1. The slaveholders of the South with their dependents; and the servile class who take their ideas from the prominent men about them. This servile class is more numerous at the South than even at the North.

2. It has almost all the distinguished politicians of the North and South; the distinguished great politicians in the Congress of the nation, and the distinguished little politicians in the Congress of the several states.

3. It has likewise the greater portion of the wealthy and educated men in many large towns of the North; with their dependents and the servile men who take their opinions from the prominent class about them. And here, I am sorry to say, I must reckon the greater portion of the prominent and wealthy clergy, the clergy in the large cities. Once this class of men were masters of the rich and educated; and very terrible masters they were in Madrid and Rome. Now their successors are doing penance for those old sins. "It is a long lane," they say, "which has no turn," and the clerical has had a very short and complete turn. When I say the majority of clergy in prominent situations in the large cities are to be numbered among the allies of the despotic idea, and are a part of the great pro-slavery army, I know there are some noble and honorable exceptions, men who do not fear the face of gold, but reverence the face of God.

Then on the side of the democratic idea there are:

1. The great mass of the people at the North; farmers, mechanics, and the humbler clergy. This does not appear so at first, because these men have not much confidence in themselves, and require to be shaken many times before they are thoroughly waked up.

2. Besides that, there are a few politicians at the North who are on this side; some distinguished ones in Congress, some less distinguished ones in the various legislatures of the North.

3. Next there are men, North and South, who look at the great causes of the welfare of nations, and make up their minds historically, from the facts of human history, against despotism. Then there are such as study the great principles of justice and truth, and judge from human nature, and decide against despotism. And then such as look at the law of God, and believe Christianity is sense and not nonsense; that Christianity is the ideal for earnest men, not a pretense for a frivolous hypocrite. Some of these men are at the South; the greater number are in the North; here you see the difference between the son of the Planter and the son of the Puritan.

Here are the allies, the threefold armies of Despotism on the one side, and of Democracy on the other.

Now it is not possible for these two ideas to continue to live in peace. For a long time each knew not the other, and they were quiet. The men who clearly knew the despotic idea thought, in 1787, it would die "of a rapid consumption"; they said so; but the culture of cotton has healed its deadly wound, at least for the present. After the brief state of quiet, there came a state of armed neutrality. They were hostile, but under bonds to keep the peace. Each bit his thumb, but neither dared say he bit it at the other. Now the neutrality is over; attempts are made to compromise, to compose the difficulty. Various peace measures were introduced to the Senate last summer; but they all turned out war measures, every one of them. Now there is a trial of strength between the two. Which shall recede? which be extended? Freedom or Slavery? That is the question; refuse to look at it as we will — refrain or refrain not from "political agitation," that is the question . . .

Of the final issue I have no doubt; but no man can tell what shall come to pass in the meantime. We see that political parties in the State are snapped asunder: whether the national party shall not be broken up, no man can say. In 1750, on the 28th day of November, no man in

Old England or New England could tell what 1780 would bring forth. No man, North or South, can tell today what 1880 will bring to pass. He must be a bold man who declares to the nation that no new political machinery shall be introduced, in the next thirty years, to our national mill. We know not what a day shall bring forth, but we know that God is on the side of right and justice, and that they will prevail so long as God is God...

“Government Ought to Be Democratic”

Few indeed were the white people who advocated the immediate emancipation of the Negro people, and their enfranchisement as well. One whose name deserves to be better known was Norton S. Townshend (1815-1895). English-born, he came to Ohio when a lad of fifteen. After a brief period as a teacher, he enlisted in the temperance and anti-slavery struggles, and in the 1840's was elected a member of the State legislature. There he sought to repeal laws which made Ohio schools Jim-Crow and her courts discriminatory. As a delegate to the Ohio State Constitutional Convention (1850-1851) he pleaded for extension to women of the right to vote, and also argued eloquently for enfranchising Negro men. Neither plea was successful, but both were historic pioneering efforts. Townshend's remarks on Negro suffrage made in the Convention on February 8 1851, follow.*

To attempt to govern men without seeking their consent is usurpation and tyranny, whether in Ohio or in Austria. There is a portion of the people of this State who have the same right to stand upon this part of God's earth, and to

* Source: Irving Mark & E. L. Schwaab, eds., *The Faith of Our Fathers* (N. Y., 1952), pp. 31-33.

breathe this free air, that you or I have, and yet you seek to impose a government upon them without consulting them. I can only say that they are under no obligation to obey your laws or to submit to your authority.

You burthen them with taxation without representation, and thus inflict upon them the identical wrong for which the thirteen United Colonies threw off the yoke of the mother country. To establish a government over them, not based on their consent; to subject them to laws they have had no voice in framing; to tax them while you deny them representation is clearly and manifestly unjust; and I might stop here without urging any further objections to the Report [on suffrage], for with governments there should be really but one enquiry, what is just?

Another objection I have to this limitation of the right of suffrage, I believe it is *antidemocratic*. I desire to speak on this point with modesty, for I am but a young man, while I see around me many whose hair has grown gray in the study of democratic principles. One of these gentlemen has said with Jefferson that democracy consists in doing "equal and exact justice to all men," another gentleman has said that democracy concedes to others all it demands for itself, and demands for itself all it concedes to others. If the restriction of the elective franchise is tested by either of these rules it will be found to be anti-democratic. Jefferson's rule should be amended so as to read "equal and exact justice to all *white* men – or to all men *except Negroes*."

If I understand genuine democracy it is neither more nor less than the golden rule of Christianity applied to politics, or to our civil relations . . . I believe it to be our duty here to erect a civil platform upon which the foot of every person in the State may stand and on exactly the same level. I have not intentionally given in this body, one vote, nor do I intend to give one vote, to place any man, or set of men, above the common level. I will vote for no franchise, if by that is meant a something which

makes one man free to do what may not be done by others. I will vote for no privilege, if by that is meant private law for the benefit of the few over the many.

If the government of Ohio is to be in the hands of a privileged class, whether that class be large or small it will be an aristocracy, a form of government for which I have no partiality; this government ought to be democratic – a government shared by all, for the good of all. Let us then have no limitations of suffrage – for who does not know that all such limitations are antidemocratic?

“Indiscreet Freedom of Speech” (1851)

All the slave states forbade teaching slaves to read and write. Some, like Virginia, denied free Negroes the right to become literate. To violate this law made one a criminal. One case which attracted nation-wide publicity was that of a Mrs. Douglas, a white woman of Norfolk, Virginia. The following excerpt is from the statement made by a Judge Baker as he pronounced sentence upon the woman.*

Upon an indictment found against you for assembling with Negroes to instruct them to read and write, and for associating with them in an unlawful assembly, you were found guilty . . . The Court is not called on to vindicate the policy of the law in question, for so long as it remains upon the statute book, and unrepealed, public and private justice and morality require that it should be respected and sustained.

* Source: Henry S. Commager, ed., *Documents of American History* (4th edit., N. Y., 1948) I, pp. 327–29.

There are persons, I believe, in our community, opposed to the policy of the law in question. They profess to believe that universal intellectual culture is necessary to religious instruction and education, and that such culture is suitable to a state of slavery; and there can be no misapprehension as to your opinions on this subject, judging from the indiscreet freedom with which you spoke of your regard for the colored race in general. Such opinions in the present state of our society I regard as manifestly mischievous.

[Despite the Judge's remark that "the Court is not called on to vindicate the policy of the law in question," he then proceeded to deliver such a vindication running into several pages ending up with these words:]

In vindication of the policy and justness of our laws, which every individual should be taught to respect, the judgment of the Court is, in addition to the proper fine and costs, that you be imprisoned for the period of one month in the jail of this city.

The National Negro Convention of 1853

The most representative of the many pre-Civil War National Negro Conventions was that held in Rochester, New York, July 6 to July 8 1853. It was attended by 114 delegates; nearly all the greatest figures in the Negro community of the United States – who were not slaves – were present. Many documents and resolutions of great importance emerged from this Convention. Printed below is the concluding section of one of these, known as the Address of the Colored National Convention to the People of

the United States. The complete Address was the work of a committee consisting of Frederick Douglass, J. M. Wagoner, the Rev. A. N. Freeman, and George B. Vashon.

The force of fifteen hundred million dollars is arrayed against us; hence, the press, the pulpit, and the platform, against all the natural promptings of uncontaminated manhood, point their deadly missiles of ridicule, scorn and contempt at us; and bid us, on pain of being pierced through and through, to remain in our degradation.

Let the same amount of money be employed against the interest of any other class of persons, however favored by nature they may be, the result could scarcely be different from that seen in our own case. Such a people would be regarded with aversion; the money-ruled multitude would heap contumely upon them, and money-ruled institutions would proscribe them. Besides this money consideration, fellow-citizens, an explanation of the erroneous opinions prevalent concerning us is furnished in the fact, less creditable to human nature, that men are apt to hate most those whom they injure most. Having despised us, it is not strange that Americans should seek to render us despicable; having enslaved us, it is natural that they should strive to prove us unfit for freedom; having denounced us as indolent, it is not strange that they should cripple our enterprise; having assumed our inferiority, it would be extraordinary if they sought to surround us with circumstances which would serve to make us direct contradictions to their assumption.

In conclusion, fellow citizens, while conscious of the immense disadvantages which beset our pathway, and fully appreciating our own weakness, we are encouraged to persevere in efforts adapted to our improvement, by a firm reliance upon God, and a settled conviction, as immovable as the everlasting hills, that all the truths in the whole universe of God are allied to our cause.

Ernestine Rose Speaks

(1853)

"The Slaves Are the Only Civilized Ones"

Among the most remarkable and effective participants in the Abolitionist movement was Ernestine L. Rose, born Ernestine Potowski, in Poland, in 1810. The daughter of a Rabbi, she early broke with religious ideology, and as a girl of seventeen went to Berlin where she studied for two years. After traveling in several countries of Europe, she came to England in 1832, became a Utopian Socialist, and married an English worker, William Rose.

They migrated to the United States in 1836. Upon arrival, Mrs. Rose threw herself into all the radical activities in the New World, especially the struggles against slavery and for women's rights. Her courage was legendary. She carried her views into the deep South. There, as elsewhere, she stood firm against the attacks made upon her as an Abolitionist and a feminist – attacks intensified by anti-Semitic poison. William Lloyd Garrison correctly characterized her as "one of the most remarkable women, and one of the ablest and most eloquent public speakers in this country." She remained in the United States through the triumph over slavery, not returning to England until 1869; she died in that country in 1892.

An example of her style and message is offered in the following excerpts from a speech she delivered on August 4 1853 at a meeting held to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of British West Indian emancipation. This meeting, attended by perhaps 600 people, was held in Flushing, Long Island; among the speakers preceding Mrs. Rose was William Lloyd Garrison. He noted that women had played an outstanding part in developing the anti-slavery movement in England, and paid tribute particularly to a woman pioneer of that movement, Mrs. Elizabeth C. Heyrick (1769–1831). It is to this that Mrs. Rose refers in her opening.*

* Source: This speech was published in full in *The Liberator* and in the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, a long summary and copious quotations also appeared in the *N.Y. Tribune* contemporaneously. It was reprinted with notes by M. U. Schappes in *The Journal of Negro History*, July, 1949.

Friends: I can hardly leave this place without raising my voice in unison with those who have spoken here. Indeed, the exercises of this celebration would not appear to me complete, without having woman raise her voice in this great and noble cause; for when has any good cause been effected without her cooperation? We have been told, today, that it was a woman that agitated Great Britain to its very center, before emancipation could be effected in her colonies. Woman must go hand in hand with man in every great and noble cause, if success would be insured. . . .

We have the evil [of slavery] among us, we see it daily and hourly before us; we have become accustomed to it; we talk about it; but do we comprehend it – do we realize it – do we feel it? What is it to be a slave? Not to be your own self bodily, mentally, morally – that is to be a slave.

Ay, even if slaveholders treated their slaves with the utmost kindness and charity; if I were told they kept them sitting on a sofa all day, and fed them with the best of the land, it is none the less slavery; for what does slavery mean? To work hard, to fare ill, to suffer hardship, that is not slavery; for many of us white men and women have to work hard, have to fare ill, have to suffer hardship, and yet we are not slaves. Slavery is, not to belong to yourself – to be robbed of yourself.

There is nothing I abhor so much as that single thing – to be robbed of one's self. We are our own legitimate masters. Nature has not created masters and slaves . . . I go for emancipation of all kinds – white and Black, man and woman . . . there should be no slaves of any kind among them . . .

A gentleman once asked me at the South, what I thought, on the whole, of South Carolina. I told him: "I am sorry to say that you are a century at least, behind in the means of civilization." He wanted to know why I thought so. I said: "The only civilization you have exists among your slaves; for if industry and the mechanical

arts are the great criterion of civilization (and I believe they are), then certainly the slaves are the only civilized ones among you, because they do all the work." . . .

The same right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, that pertains to man, pertains to woman also. For what is life without liberty? Which of you here before me would not willingly risk his or her life, if in danger of being made a slave? Emancipation from every kind of bondage is my principle. I go for the recognition of human rights, without distinction of sect, party, sex, or color.

"A Key To Uncle Tom's Cabin" (1853)

Without a doubt the single anti-slavery work that reached and influenced more people throughout the world than any other was the novel, Uncle Tom's Cabin, by Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811 to 1896).

Harriet Beecher, daughter of a minister, was born in Connecticut. She taught school for a time in Hartford, and moved to Cincinnati, Ohio when her father, Dr. Lyman Beecher, became head of Lane Theological Seminary. Here she taught in schools in that city and visited Kentucky; there she saw something of slavery at first hand, while she was in Cincinnati she met many fugitives from slavery. A brother influenced her since he had lived some time in Louisiana and been disgusted by the slave system.

At Lane, Miss Beecher married Professor Calvin Ellis Stowe, a divinity scholar, and went with him to Maine when he received an appointment at Bowdoin College. There, encouraged by her husband - and despite the burdens of raising six children on a professor's very modest income - she wrote her immortal novel, which was published serially from June, 1851 through April, 1852 in an Abolitionist newspaper. In 1852 a Boston publisher issued the work in two volumes.

A seeming miracle happened; the serialization and then the novel swept the country – 300 000 copies of the two volumes were sold in one year. Actually it was no miracle at all, of course; rather the work of the fighters against slavery for several decades had helped prepare the way and great socio-economic changes in the United States – especially the growth of industrial capitalism, of a relatively numerous working class and of an increasingly populated free West – had made the times more and more propitious for the kind of passionate drama that Mrs. Stowe produced.

Mrs. Stowe's own approach to slavery and to the Negro people was marked by a certain sentimentality and a strong dose of patronage; in a sense these failings, which were quite common among many white Americans, made her novel more acceptable to them than it might otherwise have been. But the great fact remained that her book in essence was an excoriation of the abomination of slavery and it entered the hearts of all decent humanity throughout the world.

Adherents of slavery, faced with the colossal impact of Uncle Tom's Cabin, at once began a massive campaign directed against its authenticity. In response to the challenge, Mrs. Stowe published in 1853 a book of 260 double-column pages entitled A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin; presenting the original facts and documents upon which the story is founded. It would have been better for the friends of slavery if they had never challenged Mrs. Stowe, for this volume – to a degree resting rather heavily upon Weld's American Slavery As It Is, but supplemented by later material – again reached tens of thousands of Americans and presented the horrors of slavery in documented form.

Four extracts from this Key are presented below. The first is taken from the opening chapter of the volume and explains the author's intent; the second brief quotation indicates the central significance for Mrs. Stowe, as for the whole anti-slavery effort, of the existence and testimony of fugitive slaves; the third is an eyewitness account of one of the features of slavery as seen in New Orleans by Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe, who will be further identified later; the fourth is a letter from Dr. James W. C. Pennington – also to be identified later – discussing the systematic effort at debasement present in the American slave system.

A. *The Book's Opening*

At different times, doubt has been expressed whether the representations of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" are a fair representation of slavery as it at present exists. This work, more, perhaps, than any other work of fiction that ever was written, has been a collection and arrangement of real incidents – of actions really performed, of words and expressions really uttered – grouped together with reference to a general result, in the same manner that the mosaic artist groups his fragments of various stones into one general picture. His is a mosaic of gems – this is a mosaic of facts.

Artistically considered, it might not be best to point out in which quarry and from which region each fragment of the mosaic picture had its origin; and it is equally unartistic to disentangle the glittering web of fiction, and show out of what real warp and woof it is woven, and with what real coloring dyed. But the book had a purpose entirely transcending the artistic one, and accordingly encounters, at the hands of the public, demands not usually made on fictitious works. It is *treated* as a reality; and therefore as a reality it may be proper that it should be defended.

The writer acknowledges that the book is a very inadequate representation of slavery; and it is so, necessarily, for this reason – that slavery, in some of its workings, is too dreadful for the purposes of art. A work which should represent it strictly as it is would be a work which could not be read.

B. *On Fugitive Slaves*

It is supposed by many that the great outcry among those who are opposed to slavery comes from a morbid reading of unauthenticated accounts gotten up in aboli-

tion papers, etc. This idea is a very mistaken one. The accounts which tell against the slave system are derived from the continual living testimony of the poor slave himself; often from that of the fugitives from slavery who are continually passing through our Northern cities.

C. Dr. Howe in New Orleans

Mrs. Stowe included in her volume a letter written by Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe (1801-1876) to Charles Sumner, the great anti-slavery U.S. Senator from Massachusetts. Howe, born in Boston, was an M.D. from Harvard. He served as a physician assisting the Greek revolutionists for six years; on his return to the United States he was a pioneer in introducing scientific treatment for the blind and the mentally ill. He was, also, a staunch foe of slavery. In connection with his professional duties he visited the South from time to time; the letter to Sumner reported on a phase of one such visit.

I have passed ten days in New Orleans, not unprofitably, I trust, in examining the public institutions — the schools, asylums, hospitals, prisons, etc. With the exception of the first, there is little hope of amelioration. I know not how much merit there may be in their system; but I do know that, in the administration of the penal code, there are abominations which should bring down the fate of Sodom upon the city. If Howard or Mrs. Fry* ever discovered so ill-administered a den of thieves as the New Orleans prison, they never described it. In the Negro's apartment I saw much which made me blush that I was a white man, and which, for a moment, stirred up an evil spirit in my animal nature.

* John Howard (1726-1790), pioneer reformer of prison conditions in England; Mrs. Elizabeth G. Fry (1780-1845), an English Quaker influential in beginning reforms in treatment of women prisoners.

Entering a large paved courtyard, around which ran galleries filled with slaves of all ages, sexes and colors, I heard the snap of a whip, every stroke of which sounded like the sharp crack of a pistol. I turned my head, and beheld a sight which absolutely chilled me to the marrow of my bones, and gave me, for the first time in my life, the sensation of my hair stiffening at the roots.

There lay a black girl flat upon her face, on a board, her two thumbs tied, and fastened to one end, her feet tied, and drawn tightly to the other end, while a strap passed over the small of her back, and, fastened around the board, compressed her closely to it. Below the strap she was entirely naked. By her side, and six feet off, stood a huge Negro, with a long whip, which he applied with dreadful power and wonderful precision.

Every stroke brought away a strip of skin, which clung to the lash, or fell quivering on the pavement, while the blood flowed after it. The poor creature writhed and shrieked, and, in a voice which showed alike her fear of death and her dreadful agony, screamed to her master, who stood at her head, "O, spare my life! don't cut my soul out!" But still the horrid lash; still strip after strip peeled off from the skin; gash after gash was cut in her living flesh, until it became a livid and bloody mass of raw and quivering muscle.

It was with the greatest difficulty I refrained from springing upon the torturer, and arresting his lash; but, alas! what could I do, but turn aside to hide my tears for the sufferer, and my blushes for humanity? This was in a public and regularly-organized prison; the punishment was one recognized and authorized by the law.

But think you the poor wretch had committed a heinous offense, and had been convicted thereof, and sentenced to the lash? Not at all. She was brought by her master to be whipped by the common executioner, without trial, judge or jury, just at his beck or nod, for some real or supposed offense, or to gratify his own whim or malice.

And he may bring her day after day, without cause assigned, and inflict any number of lashes he pleases, short of twenty-five, provided only he pays the fee. Or, if he choose, he may have a private whipping board on his own premises, and brutalize himself there. A shocking part of this horrid punishment was its publicity, as I have said; it was in a courtyard surrounded by galleries, which were filled with colored persons of all sexes – runaway slaves, committed for some crime, or slaves up for sale.

D. *The Rev. Dr. Pennington's Letter*

James W. C. Pennington was an escaped slave, from Maryland; thereafter in Pennsylvania and New York he educated himself, and then was able to go abroad and finish his formal education as a Doctor of Divinity. He was the author of one of the earliest attempts at a history of the Negro people (1841) and of one of the many influential fugitive slave narratives (1850). Pennington was one of the members of the original Executive Committee of the American Anti-Slavery Society (1833) and functioned thereafter as an extremely effective Abolitionist. Mrs. Stowe wrote Dr. Pennington what his opinion was of the point made in her novel that "Deep, deep down in the dark, still waters of his [the slave's] soul is the conviction, heavier, bitterer than all others, that he is not regarded as a man." His reply was dated New York City, November 30 1852 and read as follows.

Esteemed Madam:

I have duly received your kind letter . . . in which you state that you "have an intense curiosity to know how far I have rightly divined the heart of the slave." You give me your idea in these words: "There lies buried down in the heart of the most seemingly careless and stupid slave a *bleeding spot*, that bleeds and aches, though he could scarcely tell why; and that this sore spot is the *degradation* of his position."

After escaping from the plantation of Dr. Tilghman, in Washington County, Md., where I was held as a slave, and worked as a blacksmith, I came to the State of Pennsylvania, and, after experiencing there some of the vicissitudes referred to in my little published narrative, I came into New York State, bringing in my mind a certain indescribable feeling of wretchedness. They used to say of me at Dr. Tilghman's, "That blacksmith Jemmy is a 'cute fellow; still water runs deep." But I confess that "blacksmith Jemmy" was not 'cute enough to understand the cause of his own wretchedness. The current of the still water may have run deep, but it did not reach down to that awful bed of lava.

At times I thought it occasioned by the lurking fear of betrayal. There was no Vigilance Committee* at the time – there were but anti-slavery men. I came North with my counsels in my own cautious breast. I married a wife, and did not tell her I was a fugitive. None of my friends knew it. I knew not the means of safety, and hence I was constantly in fear of meeting with some one who would betray me.

It was fully two years before I could hold up my head; but still that feeling was in my mind . . .

Soon after this [in 1846] when I sailed to the island of Jamaica, and on landing there saw colored men in all the stations of civil, social, commercial life, where I had seen white men in this country, that feeling of wretchedness experienced a sensible relief, as if some feverish sore had been just reached by just the right kind of balm. There was before my eye evidence that a colored man is more than "a nigger." I went into the House of Assembly at Spanishtown, where fifteen out of forty-five members

* In most of the larger Northern cities, the Negro people and white allies had formed Vigilance Committees to protect fugitive slaves, and to frighten away or – if needed – fight off slave catchers.

were colored men. I went into the court, where I saw in the jury box colored men and white men together, colored and white lawyers at the bar. I went into the common council of Kingston; there I found men of different colors. So in all the counting rooms, etc., etc.

But still there was a drawback. Somebody says, "This is nothing but a nigger island." Now, then, my old trouble came back again; "a nigger among niggers is a nigger still."

In 1849, when I undertook my second visit to Great Britain, I resolved to prolong and extend my travel and intercourse with the best class of men, with a view to see if I could banish that troublesome old ghost out of my mind. In England, Scotland, Wales, France, Germany, Belgium and Prussia, my whole power has been concentrated on this object. "I'll be a man, and I'll kill off this enemy which has haunted me these twenty years and more."

I believe I have succeeded in some good degree; at least, I have now no more trouble on the score of equal manhood with the whites. My European tour was certainly useful, because there the trial was fair and honorable. I had nothing to complain of. I got what was due from man to man. I sought not to be treated as a pet. I put myself into the harness, and wrought manfully in the first pulpits, and the platforms in peace congresses, conventions, anniversaries, commencements, etc.; and in these exercises that rusty old iron came out of my soul, and went "clean away."

You say again you have never seen a slave, however careless and merry-hearted, who had not this sore place, and that did not shrink or get angry if a finger was laid on it. I see that you have been a close observer of Negro nature.

So far as I understand your idea, I think you are perfectly correct in the impression you have received, as explained in your note.

O, Mrs. Stowe, slavery is an awful system! It takes man as God made him; it demolishes him, and then miscreates him, or perhaps I should say mal-creates him!

Wishing you good health and good success in your arduous work . . .

Ralph Waldo Emerson

(1854)

"Liberty Is Never Cheap"

One of the most distinguished essayists, poets and philosophers produced by the United States was Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803 to 1882). Born in Boston, the descendant of a long line of New England clergymen and himself briefly a Unitarian minister, Emerson was most influential as the philosopher of transcendentalism. His essays, poems and lectures reached a wide audience and he gained an international reputation; he was the friend of Coleridge, Carlyle and Wordsworth, and through them became familiar with seventeenth and eighteenth century German idealism.

His insistence upon individuality, upon the need to develop an American national culture, and upon the destructive qualities of conformity, made him a seminal influence in his generation. He tended to avoid political questions – in one of his essays, devoted to slavery, he began by apologizing: "I do not often speak to public questions." But the great question of slavery and especially the dramatic escape of fugitive slaves, and the passage of the odious Fugitive Slave Law by the U.S. Government in 1850, led him to participate in this struggle even though it belatedly and somewhat haltingly. He delivered two lectures on the Fugitive Slave Law. The second, from which brief selections follow, was delivered in New York City on March 4 1854.

To faint hearts the times offer no invitation, and torpor exists here throughout the active classes on the subject of domestic slavery and its appalling aggressions. Yes, that

is the stern edict of Providence, that liberty shall be no hasty fruit, but that event on event, population on population, age on age, shall cast itself into the opposite scale, and not until liberty has slowly accumulated weight enough to countervail and preponderate against all this, can the sufficient recoil come. All the great cities, all the refined circles, all the statesmen, Guizot, Palmerston, Webster, Calhoun*, are sure to be found befriending liberty with their words, and crushing it with their votes. Liberty is never cheap. . . .

Whilst the inconsistency of slavery with the principles on which the world is built guarantees its downfall, I own that the patience it requires is almost too sublime for mortals, and seems to demand of us more than mere hoping. And when one sees how fast the rot spreads – it is growing serious – I think we demand of superior men that they be superior in this – that the mind and the virtue shall give their verdict in their day, and accelerate so far the progress of civilization. Possession is sure to throw its stupid strength for existing power, and appetite and ambition will go for that. Let the aid of virtue, intelligence and education be cast where they rightfully belong. They are organically ours. Let them be loyal to their own. I wish to see the instructed class here know their own flag, and not fire on their comrades. We should not forgive the clergy for taking on every issue the immoral side; nor the Bench, if it put itself on the side of the culprit; nor the Government, if it sustain the mob against the law.

* François Guizot, French historian and politician, leading exponent of the bourgeois monarchy of Louis Philippe, Premier overthrown by the 1848 Revolution; Lord Palmerston, British Foreign Minister and Prime Minister, helped crush revolutions in Portugal and Spain (1832–34), brutal in crushing Indian liberation efforts, later sympathetic to Confederacy; Daniel Webster (1782–1852), U. S. Senator from Massachusetts, and Secretary of State, supporter of the Compromise of 1850, including the Fugitive Slave Law; Calhoun was pinpointed earlier.

It is a potent support and ally to a brave man standing single, or with a few, for the right, and outvoted and ostracized, to know that better men in other parts of the country appreciate the service and will rightly report him to his own and the next age. Without this assurance, he will sooner sink. He may well say, "If my countrymen do not care to be defended, I too will decline the controversy, from which I only reap invectives and hatred." Yet the lovers of liberty may with reason tax the coldness and indifferentism of scholars and literary men. They are lovers of liberty in Greece and Rome and in the English Commonwealth, but they are lukewarm lovers of the liberty of America in 1854.

"The Moses of Her People"

(1854)

In many respects the most remarkable woman in American history was Harriet Tubman (c. 1820–1913), born into slavery in Maryland. She escaped in 1849 and became the most successful conductor on the Underground Railroad, operating in its most difficult terrain – the slave South, itself. She made repeated trips into the South and, armed with a pistol, brought to freedom party after party of slaves – men, women, and children. Harriet Tubman personally led out of slavery a total of 300 human beings. She was a noted figure in Abolitionist meetings and a devoted friend of John Brown. During the Civil War she participated with Union forces in South Carolina – sometimes carrying a rifle – as nurse, guide, spy.

A typical trip made by Harriet Tubman is briefly described in a letter dated Wilmington, Delaware, December 29 1854 and written by Thomas Garrett (1789–1871) to J. Miller McKim at the anti-slavery headquarters in Philadelphia. Garrett was one of*

* Source: William Still, *The Underground Railroad* (Philadelphia, 1872), p. 296.

the white people living in the slave area who courageously devoted themselves to the cause of Negro freedom. A Quaker and a toolmaker, he made his home in Delaware a station on the Underground Railroad and assisted nearly three thousand fugitives. In 1848, Garrett was convicted for these "criminal" activities and was so heavily fined that he was stripped of all resources. Friends came to his assistance and he continued to help fugitives from his humble home in Wilmington until slavery was abolished. The text of the letter follows.

We made arrangements last night, and sent away Harriet Tubman, with six men and one woman to Allen Agnew's, to be forwarded across the country to the city [i. e., to Philadelphia]. Harriet, and one of the men, had worn their shoes off their feet, and I gave them two dollars to help fit them out, and directed a carriage to be hired at my expense, to take them out, but do not yet know the expense. I now have two more [fugitives] from the lowest county in Maryland, on the Peninsula, upwards of one hundred miles. I will try to get one of our trusty colored men to take them tomorrow morning to the Anti-slavery office. You can pass them on.

Abraham Lincoln

(1855)

"Will Slavery End Peacefully?"

The individual dearest to the hearts of the American people is Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865), sixteenth President of the United States. Born of impoverished pioneer folk in Kentucky, a carpenter, rail splitter, bandyman, lacking formal education, self-taught surveyor and lawyer, member of the Illinois State legislature and, briefly, of the House of Representatives in Washington, he is immortalized as the savior of the Republic and the Emancipator of four million Negro slaves.

A man of deep sensitivity, profound humaneness, great perception, and sterling courage, he combined all these virtues with splendid patriotic devotion and a principled adherence to the ideas of the Declaration of Independence. Although not an Abolitionist, he hated slavery; although not quite free of chauvinism – hence always believing that the free Negro masses would have to leave the United States – he nevertheless, was far ahead of most white Americans of his day in his basic regard for the humanity of the Negro and his understanding that freedom was the Negro's due and that Slavery was cancerous for the entire nation.

One of the most revealing statements from Lincoln of his attitude on the question came in a letter sent by him to a friend on August 15 1855. The pertinent paragraphs follow.

Experience has demonstrated, I think, that there is no peaceful extinction of slavery in prospect for us. The signal failure of Henry Clay* and other good and great men, in 1849, to effect anything in favor of gradual emancipation in Kentucky, together with a thousand other signs, extinguished that hope utterly. On the question of liberty as a principle, we are not what we have been. When we were the political slaves of King George, and wanted to be free, we called the maxim that "all men are created equal," a self-evident truth, but now when we have grown fat, and have lost all dread of being slaves ourselves, we have become so greedy to be masters that we call the same maxim "a self-evident lie." The Fourth of July has not quite dwindled away; it is still a great day – for burning fire-crackers!!!

That spirit which desired the peaceful extinction of slavery has itself become extinct, with the occasion and

* Henry Clay (1777–1852), leading Kentucky statesman, serving in the House and Senate for many years, Secretary of State, 1825–29, and several times presidential candidate of the Whig Party.

the men of the Revolution. Under the impulse of that occasion, nearly half the States adopted systems of emancipation at once, and it is a significant fact that not a single State has done the like since. So far as peaceful voluntary emancipation is concerned, the condition of the Negro slave in America, scarcely less terrible to the contemplation of a free mind, is now as fixed and hopeless of change for the better, as that of the lost souls of the finally impenitent. The Autocrat of all the Russias will resign his crown and proclaim his subjects free republicans sooner than will our American masters voluntarily give up their slaves.

Walt Whitman

(1855)

"My Fire-Lock in the Corner"

In previous pages, a brief selection from the prose of Walt Whitman was offered. But, of course, his genius lay in poetry; it was a medium Whitman also used for expressing his opinion of Negro slavery. In the first edition (1855) of Leaves of Grass, in Section 10, were the following lines, devoted to the great drama of the fugitive slave. This was a drama that touched the hearts of millions of white Americans, that made thousands of them "criminals" so far as the law of the land then stood. It is interesting to note that his poems on the Civil War – the war fought against slavery – are among the greatest that he wrote.

The runaway slave came to my house and stopt outside;
I heard his motions crackling the twigs of the woodpile;
Through the swung half-door of the kitchen I saw him
 limpsy and weak,
And went where he sat on a log, and led him in and
 assured him,

And brought water, and fill'd a tub for his sweated body
and bruis'd feet,
And gave him a room that enter'd from my own, and
gave him some coarse clean clothes,
And remember perfectly well his revolving eyes and his
awkwardness,
And remember putting plasters on the galls of his neck
and ankles;
He staid with me a week before he was recuperated and
pass'd north;
(I had him sit next me at table – my fire-lock lean'd in
the corner).

A Jim-Crow School Is Closed (1855)

A previous document has called attention to the battle to end segregated education in Boston. This long struggle was finally won in September 1855. On December 17 a dinner was given by the Negro community of Boston in honor of William C. Nell, outstanding Negro Abolitionist, who had played the leading role in this particular effort. The closing paragraphs of the speech Nell made on that occasion follow.

In the dark hours of our struggle, when betrayed by traitors within and beset by foes without, while some men would become lukewarm and indifferent, despairing of victory, then did the women keep the flame alive, and as their hopes would weave bright visions for the future, their husbands and brothers would rally for a new attack upon the fortress of colorphobia. Yes, Sir, it was the *mothers*, God bless them, of these little bright-eyed boys and girls, who, through every step of our progress, were executive and vigilant, even to that memorable Monday

morning (September 3 1855), the trial hour, when the colored children of Boston went up to occupy the long-promised land. It was these mothers who accompanied me to the various schoolhouses, to residences of teachers and committeemen, to see the laws of the Old Bay States applied in good faith . . .

On the morning preceding their advent to the public schools, I saw from my window a boy passing the exclusive Smith School (where he had been a pupil), and, raising his hands, he exultingly exclaimed to his companions, *Goodbye forever, colored school! Tomorrow we are like other Boston boys!*

Charles Sumner

(1856)

"Crime Against Kansas"

One of the greatest oratorical efforts in United States congressional history was the speech entitled "The Crime Against Kansas," delivered in the Senate, May 19 and 20 1856, by Charles Sumner of Massachusetts (1811-1874).

Sumner, a Boston attorney, became identified with the anti-slavery movement in the 1840's. In 1848 he was defeated when running for Congress on the ticket of the newly-formed Free Soil Party. Three years later, however, a coalition of Free-Soilers and Democrats sent him to the United States Senate. He remained a Senator until his death in 1874.

What disposition was to be made of the federal territories, and whether in particular the institution of slavery was or was not to be permitted there, constituted one of the main political questions in the period before the Civil War. In the 1850's this question pivoted around the fate of the Kansas Territory. The federal government, dominated by the slave-owners, favored the side of slavery in this matter; but the anti-slavery forces and the forces of Free-Soil (They were soon to coalesce into the Republican Party) fought to make Kansas a free State. The result was veri-

table civil war in Kansas through much of the decade prior to the actual Civil War. It is this situation that Senator Sumner discussed, in ample detail, in his speech. In the course of his remarks, Senator Sumner strongly attacked Senator Andrew P. Butler of South Carolina, a leader of the intensely pro-slavery forces. In reply to this "insult," Preston S. Brooks, Butler's nephew and himself a Representative from South Carolina, attacked Sumner while he was seated at his Senate desk working on some papers, caning him into unconsciousness.

Sumner was ill for three years after this atrocious assault; but Massachusetts preferred to keep one of its Senate seats vacant, and re-elected Sumner despite his incapacitation. Even more shocking to Northern – and worldwide – opinion than the Brooks attack was the fact that leading figures and newspapers in the South defended the act.

Sumner was Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee throughout the War and, with Stevens in the House, was the leader of the Radical Republican wing during the fighting and the early years of Reconstruction.

Brief extracts from Sumner's historic 1856 speech follow.

Take down your map, sir, and you will find that the Territory of Kansas, more than any other region, occupies the middle spot of North America, equally distant from the Atlantic on the east and the Pacific on the west; from the frozen waters of Hudson's Bay on the north and the tepid Gulf Stream on the south – constituting the precise territorial center of the whole vast Continent . . . worthy to be a central pivot of American Institutions . . .

Against this Territory, thus fortunate in position and population, a Crime has been committed which is without example in the records of the Past . . . It is the rape of a virgin Territory, compelling it to the hateful embrace of Slavery; and it may be clearly traced to a depraved longing for a new slave State, the hideous offspring of such a crime, in the hope of adding to the power of Slavery in the National Government. . . .

[Senator Sumner then developed a frontal attack upon Senator Butler of South Carolina as epitomizing the most rabid of the pro-slavery faction. He concluded that section of his speech with the words which follow.]

The Senator [Butler] dreams that he can subdue the North. He disclaims the open threat, but his conduct still implies it. How little the Senator knows himself, or the strength of the cause which he persecutes! He is but a mortal man; against him is an immortal principle. With finite power he wrestles with the infinite, and he must fall. Against him are stronger battalions than any marshaled by mortal arm – the inborn, ineradicable, invincible sentiments of the human heart; against him is Nature in all her subtle forces; against him is God. Let him try to subdue these.

“... The Absurdity of Your System” (1856)

Academic freedom was an early casualty of the slave system. Schools in the South were dedicated to justifying and upholding Negro enslavement. Still, from time to time, some courageous professor in the South spoke out. A celebrated case was that involving Benjamin S. Hedrick, professor of chemistry at the University of North Carolina. Hedrick, a native North Carolinian, was a man free-soil views who generally abstained from political activity. But when he was asked, in 1856, which candidate he favored for the Presidency, he replied that his choice was John C. Frémont, candidate of the then new and radical Republican Party. He was vehemently attacked and though he bravely defended himself, he was dismissed from his post. To his defence came a colleague, Henry HARRISSE, a teacher of French, who was later to gain a world-wide reputation as a bibliographer and specialist in early American voyages. HARRISSE published an

article on "Les Universités et L'Élection"* in a French-language paper issued in St. Louis - La Revue de L'Ouest (Oct. 25 1856) - commenting on Professor Hedrick's action.

What was our joy on reading a sincere republican profession of faith, open, bold, yet modest, joined to a perfectly plausible eulogy of Mr. Frémont. What happiness to compare this act of courage with the cowardly denunciation which had occasioned it. . . .

You may eliminate all the suspicious men from your institutions of learning, you may establish any number of new colleges which will relieve you of sending your sons to free institutions. But as long as people study, and read, and think among you, the absurdity of your system will be discovered and there will always be some courageous intelligence to protest against your hateful tyranny. Close your schools, suppress learning and thought, you have nothing else to do in order to be faithful to your principles, and it is the only means which remains to you of continuing the struggle with some chances of success.

[One might add that Professor Harris was soon obliged to join Professor Hedrick in seeking new employment.]

William Cullen Bryant

(1857)

The Dred Scott Decision

William Cullen Bryant (1794-1878), one of the best-known of American poets - "Thanatopsis," "To a Waterfowl," etcetera - was also a translator and an editor of great distinction. From 1829 to his death, Bryant was the chief editor of the New York

* Source: Clement Eaton, *Freedom of Thought in the Old South* (Durham, 1940), pp. 204-05.

Evening Post, the paper took a distinctly anti-slavery stance under his direction. The incisiveness of his prose style and the sharpness of his political analyses are indicated in the editorial* he wrote concerning the Dred Scott decision, announced by the U.S. Supreme Court in February, 1857. This held that Congress had no power to prohibit slavery in the federal territories, and that the Negro was not a citizen of the United States and therefore had no standing in its courts.

The decision helped to bring to a climax the entire anti-slavery struggle in the United States. Rather than "settling" the question of slavery, as the majority of the Court had hoped, the decision further inflamed the country and enormously stimulated the growth of the Republican Party.

Some of the journalists who support the cause of the administration are pleasing themselves with the fancy that the decision of the Supreme bench of the United States in the Dred Scott case will put an end to the agitation of the slavery question. They will soon find their mistake. The feeling in the favor of liberty is not so easily smothered; discussion is not so readily silenced. One specific after another has been tried, with the same view and the same success. The Fugitive Slave Law, we are told, was to quiet all agitation, but it did not; the Nebraska bill was to stop all controversy on the slavery question, but it proved to be oil poured on the flames. The usurpation of the government of Kansas by the inroad from Missouri, was thought for a time to be a blow to the friends of liberty which they could not survive, but it only aroused them to greater activity. The election of Mr. Buchanan as President in November was to put an end to the dispute, but since November the dispute has waxed warmer and warmer. It will never end till the cause of liberty has finally triumphed. Heap

* Source: Samuel Sillen, ed., *William Cullen Bryant* (N. Y., 1945).

statute upon statute, follow up one act of Executive Interference with another, add usurpation to usurpation, and judicial decision to judicial decision, the spirit against which they are leveled is indestructible. As long as the press and speech are free, the warfare will be continued and every attempt to suppress it, by directing against it any part of the machinery of the government will only cause it to rage the more fiercely.

This has been the case hitherto. The more our Presidents have meddled with the matter – the more the majority in Congress have sought to stifle the discussion – the more force has been employed on the side of slavery, whether under the pretext of legal authority, as when Mr. Pierce called out the United States troops to enforce the pretended laws of Kansas, or, without that pretext, as when armed men crossed the border of that territory to make laws for the inhabitants, the more determined is the zeal by which the rights of freemen are asserted and upheld against the oligarchy. It will not cool the fiery temper of this zeal to know that slavery has enlisted the bench on its side; it will rather blow it into a stronger and more formidable flame.

Here are five slaveholding judges on the bench, disciples of the neologism of slavery – men who have espoused the doctrines lately invented by the Southern politicians, and who seek to engraft them upon our code of constitutional law – men who alter our constitution for us, who find in it what no man of common sense, reading it for himself, could find, what its framers never thought of putting into it, what no man discerned in it till a very few years since it was seen, with the aid of optics sharpened by the eager desire to preserve the political ascendancy of the slave states. We feel, in reading the opinions of these men, that local prejudices have gained the mastery of that bench and tainted beyond recovery the minds of the majority of the judges. The constitution which they now profess to administer, is not

the constitution under which this country has lived for seventy years; it is not the constitution which Washington, Franklin, and Jefferson, and the able jurists who filled the seat of justice in the calmer days of our republic, recognized; this is not the constitution to which we have so long looked up with reverence and admiration; it is a new constitution of which we never heard till it was invented by Mr. Calhoun, and which we cannot see adopted by the judges of our federal courts without shame and indignation.

Hereafter, if this decision shall stand for law, slavery, instead of being what the people of the slave states have hitherto called it, their peculiar institution, is a federal institution, the common patrimony and shame of all the states, those which flaunt the title of free, as well as those which accept the stigma of being the Land of Bondage; hereafter, wherever our jurisdiction extends, it carries with it the chain and the scourge, wherever our flag floats, it is the flag of slavery. If so, that flag should have the light of the stars and the streaks of running red erased from it; it should be dyed black and its device should be the whip and the fetter.

Are we to accept, without question, these new readings of the constitution – to sit down contentedly under this disgrace – to admit that the constitution was never before rightly understood, even by those who framed it – to consent that hereafter it shall be the slaveholders' instead of the freemen's constitution? Never! Never! We hold that the provisions of the constitution, so far as they regard slavery, are now just what they were when it was framed, and that no trick of interpretation can change them. The people of the free states will insist on the old impartial construction of the constitution, adopted in calmer times – the construction given it by Washington and his contemporaries, instead of that invented by modern politicians in Congress and adopted by modern politicians on the bench.

What results will grow out of this decision – to what conflicts of legislation between the states and the federal government it may lead – with what difficulty these clashing views may be composed, or how this last attempt to sustain the cause of slavery, to spread it as widely and keep it in being as long as possible, may be overruled and rendered futile by causes now in operation, we do not undertake to conjecture.

Hinton Rowan Helper

(1857)

"Impending Crisis"

The system of American Negro slavery was intensely oligarchic; as a result it led to bitter economic deprivation for the majority of non-slaveholding whites in the South – who formed some 90 per cent of the Southern white population – and to their nearly complete political subjugation. Class struggle between the rich and the poor Southern whites was bitter prior to the Civil War and tended to intensify as the oligarchic character of the social order sharpened. The class conflict was keenest in the decade prior to the Civil War.

The most famous expression of this conflict came from the pen of a non-slaveholder of North Carolina, Hinton Rowan Helper (1829–1909). It took the form of a full-length volume entitled The Impending Crisis of the South: How To Meet It. Published in 1857, it soon became a best seller; over 100 000 copies had been bought by 1860. In the elections of that year, the Helper book was influential on the side of the Republican Party.

The book was dedicated "to the non-slaveholding whites of the South." It contained some religious and moral attacks upon slavery, but its main argument was that the institution economically deprived the mass of Southern whites and brought them under the political domination of the slave-owners. Helper reflected the classic weakness among Southern poorer whites in that the planter's poison of racism infected him; this showed

itself to a degree in The Impending Crisis. It permeated Helper's later books, published after the Civil War, and made these entirely worthless. Yet his 1857 volume did play a major and positive role in the struggle against the slave system. Printed below are excerpts from its preface, and from its second chapter, especially the part thereof in which Helper developed his proposals for action.

From the Preface

... In writing this book, it has been no part of my purpose to cast unmerited opprobrium upon slaveholders, or to display any special friendliness or sympathy for the Blacks. I have considered my subject more particularly with reference to its economic aspects as regards the whites – not with reference, except in a slight degree, to its humanitarian or religious aspects. To the latter side of the question, Northern writers have already done full and timely justice...

I trust that my friends and fellow citizens of the South will read this book – nay, proud as any Southerner though I am, I entreat, I beg them to do so. And as the work, considered with reference to its author's nativity, is a novelty – the South being my birthplace and my home, and my ancestry having resided there for more than a century – so I indulge the hope that its reception by my fellow-Southrons will also be novel; that is to say, that they will receive it, in a reasonable and friendly spirit, and that they will read it and reflect upon it as an honest and faithful endeavor to treat a subject of enormous import, without rancor or prejudice, by one who naturally comes within the pale of their own sympathies...

Proposals

Thus far, in giving expression to our sincere and settled opinions, we have endeavored to show, in the first place,

that slavery is a great moral, civil and political evil – a dire enemy to true wealth and national greatness, and an atrocious crime against both God and man; and, in the second place, that it is a paramount duty which we owe to heaven, to the earth, to America, to humanity, to our posterity, to our consciences, and to our pockets to adopt effective and judicious measures for its immediate abolition . . .

We propose to subvert this entire system of oligarchal despotism. We think there should be *some* legislation for decent white men, not alone for Negroes and slaveholders. Slavery lies at the root of all the shame, poverty, ignorance, tyranny and imbecility of the South; slavery must be thoroughly eradicated. . . .

[Helper then offers a specific plan:]

1. Thorough Organization and Independent Political Action on the part of the Non-Slaveholding whites of the South.

2. Ineligibility of Slaveholders – Never another vote to the Trafficker in Human Flesh.

3. No Cooperation with Slaveholders in Politics – No fellowship with them in Religion – No affiliation with them in Society.

4. No Patronage to Slaveholding Merchants – No Guestship in Slave-waiting Hotels – No Fees to Slaveholding Lawyers – No Employment of Slaveholding Physicians – No Audience to Slaveholding Parsons.

5. No Recognition of Pro-Slavery Men, except as Rufians, Outlaws, and Criminals.

6. Abrupt Discontinuance of Subscription to Pro-Slavery Newspapers.

7. The Greatest Possible Encouragement to Free White Labor.

8. No more Hiring of Slaves by Non-Slaveholders.

9. Immediate Death to Slavery, or if not immediate, unqualified Proscription of its Advocates during the Period of its Existence.

10. A Tax of Sixty Dollars on every Slaveholder for each and every Negro in his Possession at the present time or at any intermediate time between now and the 4th of July, 1863 – said Money to be applied to the transportation of the Blacks to Liberia, to their Colonization in Central or South America, or Comfortable Settlement within the Boundaries of the United States.

11. An additional Tax of Forty Dollars per annum to be levied annually, on every Slaveholder for each and every Negro found in his possession after the 4th of July, 1863 – said Money to be paid into the hands of the Negroes so held in Slavery, or in cases of death, to their next of kin, and to be used at their own option.

Lincoln Debates Douglas

(1858)

“Bestriding the Necks of the People”

The Lincoln-Douglas debates of 1858 were of critical importance. At stake was a seat in the United States Senate for Illinois; this was of some consequence in itself. But more decisive was the fact that both men – Stephen Douglas and Abraham Lincoln – were accepted as significant leaders of their parties, the Republican and the Democratic; that both might be Presidential candidates in 1860; that both were enunciating basic doctrine on fundamental issues then bringing the country to the verge of crisis: Slavery, free soil, functions of the federal government, democratic theory.

Though Lincoln received more votes than Douglas – a notable triumph against the best-known Democrat in the country – in those days U.S. Senators were elected by the votes of the State legislators and so Douglas remained in office. It was, however, a Pyrrhic victory, and Lincoln emerged from the debates with greatly enhanced prestige.

In these debates Lincoln stressed his opposition to Nativism – i.e., prejudice against foreign-born residents of the United States – and linked this to his opposition to Negro slavery and especially to the further expansion of that slavery. This position of Lincoln and the Republican Party was important in strengthening his and its political power for it attracted the support of many European-born Americans, especially Germans and Scandinavians.

To illustrate the contents of this debate, and Lincoln's ties to the effort to destroy the institution of slavery, excerpts are offered from a speech made by Lincoln in Chicago on July 10 1858, a day after Douglas had addressed an audience in the same city. According to the local press, about 12 000 heard Douglas; about 9 000 listened to Lincoln. It reported, however, "that the Lincoln audience was enthusiastically for Lincoln, and the Douglas audience was but qualifiedly in favor of anybody."

We were often – more than once at least – in the course of Judge Douglas's speech last night, reminded that this government was made for white men – that he believed it was made for white men. Well, that is putting it into a shape in which no one wants to deny it, but the Judge then goes on into his passion for drawing inferences that are not warranted. I protest, now and forever, against the counterfeit logic which presumes that because I do not want a Negro woman for a slave, I do necessarily want her for a wife. My understanding is that I need not have her for either, but as God made us separate, we can leave one another alone and do one another much good thereby. There are white men enough to marry all the white women, and enough Black men to marry all the Black women, and in God's name let them be so

married. The Judge regales us with the terrible enormities that take place by the mixture of the races; that the inferior race bears the superior down. Why, Judge, if we do not let them get together in the territories they won't mix there. I should say at least that that is a self-evident truth.

Now, it happens that we meet together once every year, sometime about the 4th of July, for some reason or other.* These 4th of July gatherings I suppose have their uses. If you will indulge me, I will state what I suppose to be some of them.

We are now a mighty nation, we are thirty – or about thirty millions of people, and we own and inhabit about one-fifteenth part of the dry land of the whole earth. We run our memory back over the pages of history for about eighty-two years and we discover that we were then a very small people in point of numbers, vastly inferior to what we are now, with a vastly less extent of country – with vastly less of everything we deem desirable among men – we look upon the change as exceedingly advantageous to us and to our posterity, and we fix upon something that happened away back, as in some way or other being connected with this rise of prosperity.

We find a race of men living in that day whom we claim as our fathers and grandfathers; they were iron men, they fought for the principle that they were contending for; and we understood that by what they then did it has followed that the degree of prosperity that we now enjoy has come to us. We hold this annual celebration to remind ourselves of all the good done in this process of time, of how it was done and who did

*Lincoln's sarcasm in connection with the date celebrating the signing of the Declaration of Independence stemmed from the fact that the Democratic Party, in its support of slavery, found that Revolutionary Manifesto more and more embarrassing and so tended to dismiss it as a mere conglomeration of "glittering generalities".

it, and how we are historically connected with it; and we go from these meetings in better humor with ourselves – we feel more attached the one to the other, and more firmly bound to the country we inhabit. In every way we are better men in the age, and race, and country in which we live for these celebrations.

But after we have done all this we have not yet reached the whole. There is something else connected with it. We have besides these men – descended by blood from our ancestors – among us perhaps half our people who are not descendants at all of these men, they are men who have come from Europe – German, Irish, French and Scandinavian – men that have come from Europe themselves, or whose ancestors have come hither and settled here, finding themselves our equals in all things.

If they look back through this history to trace their connection with those days by blood, they find they have none, they cannot carry themselves back into that glorious epoch and make themselves feel that they are part of us, but when they look through that old Declaration of Independence they find that those old men say that “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal,” and then they feel that that moral sentiment taught in that day evidences their relation to those men, that it is the father of all moral principle in them, and that they have a right to claim it as though they were blood of the blood, and flesh of the flesh of the men who wrote that Declaration, and so they are. This is the electric cord in that Declaration that links the hearts of patriotic and liberty-loving men together, that will link those patriotic hearts as long as the love of freedom exists in the minds of men throughout the world.

Now, sirs, for the purpose of squaring things with this idea [as enunciated by Douglas] of “don’t care if slavery is voted up or down,” for sustaining the Dred Scott decision, for holding that the Declaration of Independence

did not mean anything at all, we have Judge Douglas giving his exposition of what the Declaration of Independence means, and we have him saying that the people of America are equal to the people of England. According to this construction, you Germans [in the audience] are not connected with it. Now I ask you in all soberness, if all these things, if indulged in, if ratified, if confirmed and endorsed, if taught to our children, and repeated to them, do not tend to rub out the sentiment of liberty in the country, and to transform this government into a government of some other form.

Those arguments that are made, that the inferior races are to be treated with as much allowance as they are capable of enjoying; that as much is to be done for them as their condition will allow. What are these arguments? They are the arguments that kings have made for enslaving the people in all ages of the world.

You will find that all the arguments in favor of kingcraft were of this class; they always bestrode the necks of the people, not that they wanted to do it, but because the people were better off for being ridden. That is their argument, and this argument of the Judge is the same old serpent that says you work and I eat, you toil and I will enjoy the fruits of it. Turn it whatever way you will – whether it come from the mouth of a king, an excuse for enslaving the people of his country, or from the mouth of men of one race as a reason for enslaving the men of another race, it is all the same old serpent, and I hold if that course of argumentation that is made for the purpose of convincing the public mind that we should not care about this, should be granted, it does not stop with the Negro.

I should like to know if taking this old Declaration of Independence, which declares that all men are equal upon principle and making exceptions to it where will it stop? If one man says it does not mean a Negro, why does not another say it does not mean some other man?

If that Declaration is not the truth, let us get the statute book, in which we find it and tear it out! Who is so bold as to do it! If it is not true let us tear it out! [Cries of "no, no"] Let us stick to it then, let us stand firmly by it then.

John Brown Speaks to the Court (1859) "In Behalf Of His Despised Poor"

The most dramatic personal story in American history is that of John Brown (1800-1859). Born in Connecticut, descendant of revolutionary stock, never free of poverty, he was a selfless and heroic Abolitionist. In the Kansas Wars, he made himself the scourge of the pro-slavery forces. Throughout his entire life, he was the friend and associate of Negro men and women. He is remarkable, even among white Abolitionists, for the completeness with which he overcame any feeling of racism or chauvinism. This is the main secret of the consistency and militancy of his career.

He conceived of the blow at Harper's Ferry, Virginia (now West Virginia) as part of a larger scheme which would use the Blue Ridge Mountains as a base from which attacks might be launched upon slave plantations, and to which slaves might flee. His hope was to create so many bases in the spine of the slave states that the system itself would be shaken. His longer range aim was aborted, but what he did, and the way he did it, and the manner in which he conducted himself when a prisoner coalesced to deal the institution of slavery its single greatest blow, short of the Civil War itself. It is noteworthy that his wife, Mary, carrying on the hard labor of a poor farmer's helpmate, at the same time believed as he did and was a pillar of strength to him in every venture he undertook and in the martyrdom he endured.

Captured at the federal armory, which he and his band of twenty-one men had taken in Harper's Ferry, wounded, having seen two of his sons killed before his eyes, and having borne himself defiantly and effectively in the short trial, he was asked

on November 2 1859 – quite unexpectedly to himself – if he had anything to say before sentence was imposed. Though unprepared, he rose and addressed the Court unhesitatingly and in the following words.

I have, may it please the Court, a few words to say.

In the first place, I deny everything but what I have all along admitted – the design on my part to free the slaves. I intended certainly to have made a clear thing of that matter, as I did last winter, when I went into Missouri, and there took slaves without the snapping of a gun on either side, moved them through the country, and finally left them in Canada. I designed to have done the same thing again, on a larger scale. That was all I intended. I never did intend murder, or treason, or the destruction of property, or to excite or incite slaves to rebellion, or to make insurrection.

I have another objection: and that is, it is unjust that I should suffer such a penalty. Had I interfered in the manner which I admit, and which I admit has been fairly proved (for I admire the truthfulness and candor of the greater portion of the witnesses who have testified in this case) – had I so interfered in behalf of the rich, the powerful, the intelligent, the so-called great, or in behalf of any of their friends, either father, mother, brother, sister, wife, or children, or any of that class, and suffered and sacrificed what I have in this interference, it would have been all right, and every man in this Court would have deemed it an act worthy of reward rather than punishment.

This Court acknowledges, as I suppose, the validity of the Law of God. I see a book kissed here which I suppose to be the Bible, or, at least, the New Testament. That teaches me that all things “whatsoever I would that men should do unto me, I should do even so to them.” It teaches me, further, to “remember them that are in

bonds as bound with them." I endeavored to act up to that instruction. I say, I am yet too young to understand that God is any respecter of persons. I believe that to have interfered as I have done, as I have always freely admitted I have done, in behalf of His despised poor, was not wrong, but right. Now, if it be deemed necessary that I should forfeit my life for the furtherance of the ends of justice, and mingle my blood further with the blood of my children, and with the blood of millions in this slave country whose rights are disregarded by wicked, cruel, and unjust enactments, I submit: so let it be done!

Let me say one word further.

I feel entirely satisfied with the treatment I have received on my trial. Considering all the circumstances, it has been more generous than I expected. But I feel no consciousness of guilt. I have stated from the first what was my intention and what was not. I never had any design against the life of any person, nor any disposition to commit treason, or excite slaves to rebel, or make any general insurrection. I never encouraged any man to do so, but always discouraged any idea of that kind.

Let me say, also, a word in regard to the statements made by some of those connected with me. I hear it has been stated by some of them that I have induced them to join me. But the contrary is true. I do not say this to injure them, but as regretting their weakness. There is not one of them but joined me of his own accord, and the greater part at their own expense. A number of them I never saw, and never had a word of conversation with, till the day they came to me, and that was for the purpose I have stated.

Now I have done.

John Brown was led to his execution December 2 1859; as he mounted the wagon to lead him to the gallows, he handed this memorandum to a guard:

I, John Brown, am now quite *certain* that the crimes of this *guilty land* will never be purged away but with *blood*. I had, as I now think vainly, flattered myself that without very much bloodshed it might be done.

Henry David Thoreau on John Brown

"Beauty Stands Veiled . . ."

(1859)

Genuine radicalism is deep in the American tradition; no one better personifies it than the great philosophical anarchist, Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862). Born of poor parents in Concord, Massachusetts - birthplace of the American Revolution - Thoreau gained his education at Harvard with scholarships and part-time jobs. Living simply as a pencil maker, a surveyor and general handyman, he was a leader of the transcendentalist movement, a contributor to the Dial, the constant companion of Emerson, a careful observer of Nature, the fierce foe of war, slavery and all cant, and the devoted friend and supporter of Old John Brown. His classic Walden appeared in 1854. His essays, "Civil Disobedience" (1849), "Slavery in Massachusetts" (1854) and "A Plea for Captain John Brown" (1859) are among the finest political essays ever written in the United States. These, with some of Garrison's writings, decisively influenced Leo Tolstoy and Gandhi.

On the morning of December 2 1859, the day when John Brown was to be hanged, Thoreau delivered his great "Plea for Captain John Brown" in the Concord church. It needs reading as a whole; but because of limited space, the following presents only its concluding section.

This event advertises me that there is such a fact as death, the possibility of a man's dying. It seems as if no man had ever died in America before; for in order to die you must first have lived. I don't believe in the hearses, and palls, and funerals that they have had. There was no death in the case, because there had been

no life; they merely rotted or sloughed off, pretty much as they had rotted or sloughed along. No temple's veil was rent, only a hole dug somewhere. Let the dead bury their dead. The best of them fairly ran down like a clock. Franklin - Washington - they were let off without dying; they were merely missing one day. I hear a good many pretend that they are going to die; or that they have died, for aught that I know. Nonsense! I'll defy them to do it. They haven't got life enough in them. They'll deliquesce like fungi, and keep a hundred eulogists mopping the spot where they left off. Only half a dozen or so have died since the world began.

Do you think you are going to die, sir? No! there's no hope for you. You haven't got your lesson yet. You've got to stay after school. We make a needless ado about capital punishment - taking lives, when there is no life to take. *Memento mori!* We don't understand that sublime sentence which some worthy got sculptured on his gravestone once. We've interpreted it in a groveling and sniveling sense; we've wholly forgotten how to die.

But be sure you do die nevertheless. Do your work, and finish it. If you know how to begin, you will know when to end.

These men [Brown and his comrades], in teaching us how to die, have at the same time taught us how to live. If this man's acts and words do not create a revival, it will be the severest possible satire on the acts and words that do. It is the best news that America has ever heard. It has already quickened the feeble pulse of the North, and infused more and more generous blood into her veins and heart than any number of years of what is called commercial and political prosperity could. How many a man who was lately contemplating suicide has now something to live for!

One writer says that Brown's peculiar monomania made him to be "dreaded by the Missourians as a supernatural being." Sure enough, a hero in the midst of us

cowards is always so dreaded. He is just that thing. He shows himself superior to nature. He has a spark of divinity in him.

Unless above himself he can
Erect himself, how poor a thing is man!

Newspaper editors argue also that it is proof of his *insanity* that he thought he was appointed to do this work which he did – that he did not suspect himself for a moment! They talk as if it were impossible that a man could be “divinely appointed” in these days to do any work whatever; as if vows and religion were out of date as connected with any man’s daily work; as if the agent to abolish slavery could only be somebody appointed by the President, or by some political party. They talk as if a man’s death were a failure, and his continued life, be it of whatever character, were a success.

When I reflect to what a cause this man devoted himself, and how religiously, and then reflect to what cause his judges and all who condemn him so angrily and fluently devote themselves, I see that they are as far apart as the heavens and the earth are asunder.

The amount of it is, our *leading men* are a harmless kind of folk, and they know *well enough* that *they* were not divinely appointed, but elected by the votes of their party.

Who is it whose safety requires that Captain Brown be hung? Is it indispensable to any Northern man? Is there no resource whatever but to cast this man also to the Minotaur?

If you do not wish it, say so distinctly. While these things are being done, beauty stands veiled and music is a screeching lie. Think of him – of his rare qualities! – such a man as it takes ages to make, and ages to understand; no mock hero, nor the representative of any party. A man such as the sun may not rise upon again in this

benighted land. To whose making went the costliest material, the finest adamant; sent to be the redeemer of those in captivity; and the only use to which you can put him is to hang him at the end of a rope!

You who pretend to care for Christ crucified, consider what you are about to do to him who offered himself to be the savior of four millions of men.

Any man knows when he is justified, and all the wits in the world cannot enlighten him on that point. The murderer always knows that he is justly punished; but when a government takes the life of a man without the consent of his conscience, it is an audacious government, and is taking a step towards its own dissolution. Is it not possible that an individual may be right and a government wrong? Are laws to be enforced simply because they were made? or declared by any number of men to be good, if they are *not* good? Is there any necessity for a man's being a tool to perform a deed of which his better nature disapproves? Is it the intention of lawmakers that *good* men shall be hung ever? Are judges to interpret the law according to the letter, and not the spirit? What right have *you* to enter into a compact with yourself that you *will* do thus or so, against the light within you? Is it for *you* to *make up* your mind – to form any resolution whatever – and not accept the convictions that are forced upon you, and which ever pass your understanding? I do not believe in lawyers, in that mode of attacking or defending a man, because you descend to meet the judge on his own ground, and, in cases of the highest importance, it is of no consequence whether a man breaks a human law or not. Let lawyers decide trivial cases. Business men may arrange that among themselves. If they were the interpreters of the everlasting laws which rightfully bind man, that would be another thing. A counterfeiting law factory, standing half in a slave land and half in a free! What kind of laws for free men can you expect from that?

I am here to plead his cause with you. I plead not for

his life, but for his character – his immortal life; and so it becomes your cause wholly, and is not his in the least. Some eighteen hundred years ago Christ was crucified; this morning, perchance, Captain Brown was hung. These are the two ends of a chain which is not without its links. He is not Old Brown any longer; he is an angel of light.

I see now that it was necessary that the bravest and humanest man in all the country should be hung. Perhaps he saw it himself. I *almost fear* that I may yet hear of his deliverance, doubting if a prolonged life, if *any* life, can do as much good as his death.

"Misguided!" "Garrulous!" "Insane!" "Vindictive!" So ye write in your easy-chairs, and thus the wounded responds from the floor of the Armory, clear as a cloudless sky, true as the voice of nature is:

"No man sent me here; it was of my own prompting and that of my Maker. I acknowledge no master in human form."

And in what a sweet and noble strain he proceeds, addressing his captors, who stand over him:

"I think, my friends, you are guilty of a great wrong against God and humanity, and it would be perfectly right for any one to interfere with you so far as to free those you willfully and wickedly hold in bondage."

And, referring to his movement:

"It is, in my opinion, the greatest service a man can render to God.

"I pity the poor in bondage that have none to help them; that is why I am here; not to gratify any personal animosity, revenge, or vindictive spirit. It is my sympathy with the oppressed and the wronged, that are as good as you, and as precious in the sight of God."

You don't know your testament when you see it.

"I want you to understand that I respect the rights of the poorest and weakest of colored people, oppressed by the slave power, just as much as I do those of the most wealthy and powerful.

"I wish to say, furthermore, that you had better, all you people at the South, prepare yourselves for a settlement of that question that must come up for settlement sooner than you are prepared for it. The sooner you are prepared the better. You may dispose of me very easily. I am nearly disposed of now; but this question is still to be settled — this Negro question, I mean; the end of that is not yet."

I foresee the time when the painter will paint that scene, no longer going to Rome for a subject; the poet will sing it; the historian record it; and, with the Landing of the Pilgrims and the Declaration of Independence, it will be the ornament of some future national gallery, when at least the present form of slavery shall be no more here. We shall then be at liberty to weep for Captain Brown. Then, and not till then, we will take our revenge.

Last Words of a Negro Who Died with John Brown

(1859)

Among the five Negroes who fought with John Brown's heroic band at Harper's Ferry was John A. Copeland, fugitive slave and a resident of Oberlin, Ohio before joining Brown. Upon conviction, he was sentenced to be hanged on December 16 1859. Two of the letters Copeland wrote shortly before he died have survived. One, to his brother, was dated December 10, the other, to his entire family was penned a few hours prior to his execution. The letter to his brother is printed below. The Baltimore Sun reported that on his way to the gallows, Copeland called out: "If I am dying for freedom, I could not die for a better cause — I had rather die than be a slave!"

Dear Brother . . . It was a sense of the wrongs which we have suffered that prompted the noble but unfortunate

Captain John Brown and his associates to attempt to give freedom to a small number, at least, of those who are now held by cruel and unjust laws, and by no less cruel and unjust men. To this freedom they were entitled by every known principle of justice and humanity, and for the enjoyment of it God created them.

And now, dear brother, could I die in a more noble cause? Could I, brother, die in a manner and for a cause which would induce true and honest men more to honor me, and the angels more readily to receive me to their happy home of everlasting joy above? I imagine that I hear you, and all of you, mother, father, sisters and brothers, say – “No, there is not a cause for which we, with less sorrow, could see you die.”

Believe me when I tell you, that though shut up in prison and under sentence of death, I have spent some very happy hours here. And were it not that I know that the hearts of those to whom I am attached by the nearest and most enduring ties of blood relationship – yea, by the closest and strongest ties that God has instituted – will be filled with sorrow, I would almost as lief die now as at any time, for I feel that I am now prepared to meet my Maker. . . .

James Russell Lowell on the 1860 Election

“Where Is Our Avalanche To Fall?”

Like almost all the great American writers prior to the Civil War – the only exceptions that come to mind are Hawthorne, Melville and Poe – James Russell Lowell (1819–1891) devoted some of his most notable creative efforts to the cause of emancipation. Born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, he served for many years as a professor at Harvard where he was educated. After the

War a certain respectability and conservatism enveloped him, so that he was appointed to quite eminent positions, including U.S. Minister to Madrid and to London. But his best writing was done before the War, including his classical Biglow Papers, which excoriated colonialism and unjust wars (in this case, specifically the U.S. war against Mexico), and in essays published in *The Atlantic Monthly*, of which he was the first editor (1857-61).

From the latter is taken an essay Lowell wrote on "The Election in November [1860]." His position was that, of the four candidates then running - John Bell of Tennessee on the so-called Constitutional Party, Stephen Douglas of Illinois on the (Northern) Democratic Party, John Breckinridge of Kentucky on the (Southern) Democratic Party and Abraham Lincoln of Illinois on the then quite new Republican Party - Lincoln alone really represented a coalition of forces that was not only desirous of curbing the pretensions of the slave-owners to continued domination of the federal government but also was in a position to carry it out. The essay is notable in its awareness of sharp class conflicts within the South itself. The essay is a long one; and what follows are a few relatively brief excerpts.

Whatever be the effect of slavery upon the States where it exists, there can be no doubt that its moral influence upon the North has been most disastrous. It has compelled our politicians into that first fatal compromise with their moral instincts and hereditary principles which makes all consequent ones easy; it has accustomed us to makeshifts instead of statesmanship, to subterfuge instead of policy, to party platforms for opinions, and to a defiance of the public sentiment of the civilized world for patriotism.

We have been asked to admit, first, that it was a necessary evil; then that it was good both to master and slave; then that it was the cornerstone of free institutions; then that it was a system divinely instituted under the Old Law and sanctioned under the New. With a representation, three fifths of it based on the assump-

tion that Negroes are men, the South turns upon us and insists on our acknowledging that they are things. After compelling her Northern allies to pronounce the "free and equal" clause of the preamble to the Declaration of Independence (because it stands in the way of enslaving men) a manifest absurdity, she has declared through the Supreme Court of the United States [in the Dred Scott case, 1857] that Negroes are not men in the ordinary meaning of the word. To eat dirt is bad enough, but to find that we have eaten more than was necessary may chance to give us an indigestion. The slaveholding interest has gone on step by step, forcing concession after concession, till it needs but little to secure it forever in the political supremacy of the country. Yield to its latest demand – let it mould the evil destiny of the Territories – [i.e., Lowell means, let the federal territories be opened to the institution of slavery without limitation, as the slaveholders were demanding], and the thing is done past recall. The next Presidential Election is to say *Yes* or *No*...

A great deal is said, to be sure, about the rights of the South; but has any such right been infringed? When a man invests money in any species of property, he assumes the risks to which it is liable. If he buy a house, it may be burned; if a ship, it may be wrecked; if a horse or an ox, it may die. Now the disadvantage of the Southern kind of property is – how shall we say it so as not to violate our Constitutional obligations? – that it is exceptional. When it leaves Virginia, it is a thing; when it arrives in Boston, it becomes a man, speaks human language, appeals to the justice of the same God whom we all acknowledge, weeps at the memory of wife and children left behind – in short, hath the same organs and dimensions that a Christian hath – and is not distinguishable from ordinary Christians, except, perhaps, by a simpler and more earnest faith.

There are people at the North who believe that, beside

meum and *tuum*, there is also such a thing as *suum* – who are old-fashioned enough, or weak enough, to have their feelings touched by these things, to think that human nature is older and more sacred than any claim of property whatever, and that it has rights at least as much to be respected as any hypothetical one of our Southern brethren.

This, no doubt, makes it harder to recover a fugitive chattel; but the existence of human nature in a man here and there is surely one of those accidents to be counted on at least as often as fire, shipwreck, or the cattle disease; and the man who chooses to put his money into these images of his Maker cut in ebony should be content to take the incident risks along with the advantages. We should be very sorry to deem this risk capable of diminution; for we think that the claims of a common manhood upon us should be at least as strong as those of Freemasonry, and that those whom the law of man turns away should find in the larger charity of the law of God and Nature a readier welcome and surer sanctuary.

We shall continue to think the Negro a man, and on Southern evidence, too, so long as he is counted in the population represented on the floor of Congress – for three fifths of perfect manhood would be a high average even among white men; so long as he is hanged or worse, as an example and terror to others – for we do not punish one animal for the moral improvement of the rest; so long as he is considered capable of religious instruction – for we fancy the gorillas would make short work with a missionary; so long as there are fears of insurrection – for we have never heard of a combined effort at revolt in a menagerie. Accordingly, we do not see how the particular right of whose infringement we hear so much is to be made safer by the election of Mr. Bell, Mr. Breckinridge, or Mr. Douglas, there being quite as little chance that any of them would abolish human nature as that Mr. Lincoln would abolish slav-

ery.* The same generous instinct that leads some among us to sympathize with the sorrows of the bereaved master will always, we fear, influence others to take part with the rescued man.

But if our Constitutional Obligations, as we like to call our constitutional timidity or indifference, teach us that a particular divinity hedges the Domestic Institution, they do not require us to forget that we have institutions of our own, worth maintaining and extending, and not without a certain sacredness, whether we regard the traditions of the fathers or the faith of the children. It is high time that we should hear something of the rights of the Free States, and of the duties consequent upon them. We also have our prejudices to be respected, our theory of civilization, of what constitutes the safety of a state and insures its prosperity, to be applied wherever there is soil enough for a human being to stand on and thank God for making him a man. Is conservatism applicable only to property, and not to justice, freedom, and public honor? Does it mean merely drifting with the current of evil times and pernicious counsels, and carefully nursing the ills we have, that they may, as their nature it is, grow worse?

To be told that we ought not to agitate the question of Slavery, when it is that which is forever agitating us, is like telling a man with the fever and ague on him to stop shaking, and he will be cured. The discussion of Slavery is said to be dangerous, but dangerous to what? The manufacturers of the Free States constitute a more numerous class than the slaveholders of the South: suppose they should claim an equal sanctity for the Protective System [of tariffs]? Discussion is the very life of free institutions, and fruitful mother of all political

* The Republican Party platform of 1860 pledged noninterference with slavery where it was, but also pledged that it was not to be permitted to expand further into any federally-owned land.

and moral enlightenment, and yet the question of questions must be tabooed.

The Swiss guide enjoins silence in the region of the avalanches, lest the mere vibration of the voice should dislodge the ruin clinging by frail roots of snow. But where is our avalanche to fall? It is to overwhelm the Union, we are told. The real danger to the Union will come when the encroachments of the Slave Power and the concessions of the Trade Power shall have made it a burden instead of a blessing.

The real avalanche to be dreaded – are we to expect it from the ever gathering mass of ignorant brute force, with the irresponsibility of animals and the passions of men, which is one of the fatal necessities of slavery, or from the gradually increasing consciousness of the non-slaveholding population of the Slave States of the true cause of their material impoverishment and political inferiority? From one or the other source its ruinous forces will be fed, but in either event it is not the Union that will be imperiled, but the privileged Order who on every occasion of a thwarted whim have menaced its disruption, and who will find in it their only safety.

We believe that the “irrepressible conflict” – for we accept Mr. Seward’s much-denounced phrase in all the breadth of meaning he ever meant to give it – is to take place in the South itself; because the Slave System is one of those fearful blunders in political economy which are sure, sooner or later, to work their own retribution. The inevitable tendency of slavery is to concentrate in a few hands the soil, the capital, and the power of the countries where it exists, to reduce the non-slaveholding class to a continually lower and lower level of property, intelligence, and enterprise – their increase in numbers adding much to the economical hardship of their position and nothing to their political weight in the community.

There is no home encouragement of varied agriculture – for the wants of a slave population are few in

number and limited in kind; none of inland trade, for that is developed only by communities where education induces refinement, where facility of communication stimulates invention and variety of enterprise, where newspapers make every man's improvement in tools, machinery, or culture of the soil an incitement to all, and bring all the thinkers of the world to teach in the cheap university of the people.

We do not, of course, mean to say that slaveholding States may not and do not produce fine men; but they fail, by the inherent vice of their constitution and its attendant consequences, to create enlightened, powerful, and advancing communities of men, which is the true object of all political organizations, and is essential to the prolonged existence of all those whose life and spirit are derived directly from the people. Every man who has dispassionately endeavored to enlighten himself in the matter cannot but see that, for the many, the course of things in slaveholding States is substantially what we have described, a downward one, more or less rapid, in civilization and in all those results of material prosperity which in a free country show themselves in the general advancement for the good of all, and give a real meaning to the word Commonwealth.

No matter how enormous the wealth centered in the hands of a few, it has no longer the conservative force or the beneficent influence which it exerts when equally distributed – even loses more of both where a system of absenteeism prevails so largely as in the South. In such communities the seeds of an “irrepressible conflict” are surely if slowly ripening, and signs are daily multiplying that the true peril to their social organization is looked for, less in a revolt of the owned labor than in an insurrection of intelligence in the labor that owns itself and finds itself none the richer for it. To multiply such communities is to multiply weakness.

Fighting for the Right to Fight (1861)

Because of the Jim-Crow nature of the North and of the Federal Government, the Negro people, understanding the basically anti-slavery character of the Civil War from its outset, sought individually and collectively to participate in the battle. National needs, diplomatic considerations, and military necessity – plus constant agitation – finally led the U.S. Government to permit Negroes to fight actively against the Confederacy and something like 220 000 did so in the Army and the Navy. An example of the Negroes' agitation, early in the War, comes from the resolutions adopted by a Negro mass meeting held in Boston on May 20 1861.

Whereas, the traitors of the South have assailed the United States Government, with the intention of overthrowing it for the purpose of perpetuating slavery; and,

Whereas, in such a contest between the North and South – believing, as we do, that it is a contest between liberty and despotism – it is as important for each class of citizens to declare, as it is for the rulers of the Government to know, their sentiments and position; therefore,

Resolved, that our feelings urge us to say to our countrymen that we are ready to stand by and defend the Government as the equals of its white defenders – to do so with “our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor,” for the sake of freedom and as good citizens; and we ask you to modify your laws, that we may enlist – that full scope may be given to the patriotic feelings burning in the colored man’s breast – and we pledge ourselves to raise an army in the country of fifty thousand colored men.

Resolved, that more than half of the army which we could raise, being natives of the South, knowing its ge-

ography, and being acquainted with the character of the enemy, would be of incalculable service to the Government.

Resolved, that the colored women would go as nurses, seamstresses, and warriors, if need be, to crush rebellion and uphold the Government.

Resolved, that the colored people, almost without an exception "have their souls in arms, and all eager for the fray," and are ready to go at a moment's warning, if they are allowed to go as soldiers.

Resolved, that we do immediately organize ourselves into drilling companies, to the end of becoming better skilled in the use of firearms; so that when we shall be called upon by the country, we shall be better prepared to make a ready and fitting response.

Lincoln's Message to a Special Session of Congress

(1861)

"Essentially a People's Contest"

Having been inaugurated President in March 1861, Lincoln saw the deliberate resort to violence by the Confederate leaders in their firing on Fort Sumter in April, and then their launching of massive armed attacks. Lincoln immediately began the organization of resistance in a divided, vacillating, uncertain North. In July he called the Congress into an extraordinary session. On the Fourth of July he sent an address to that Congress asking full support in the mobilization of the nation's might to defeat its attackers. In this address he developed rather fully his idea of the War as a denial of the principles of the Declaration of Independence, and of the need for their restatement and for the dedi-

cation of life and effort to their vindication. Printed below is that portion of his Message in which Lincoln develops this premise, so central to his entire life.

It may be affirmed, without extravagance, that the free institutions we enjoy, have developed the powers, and improved the condition of our whole people, beyond any example in the world. Of this we now have a striking and an impressive illustration. So large an army as the government has now on foot, was never before known, without a soldier in it, but who has taken his place there, of his own free choice. But more than this: there are many single Regiments whose members, one and another, possess full practical knowledge of all the arts, sciences, professions, and whatever else, whether useful or elegant, is known in the world; and there is scarcely one, from which there could not be selected a President, a Cabinet, a Congress, and perhaps a Court, abundantly competent to administer the government itself.

Nor do I say that this is not true also in the army of our late friends, now adversaries in this contest; but if it is, so much better the reason why the government which has conferred such benefits on both them and us should not be broken up. Whoever in any section proposes to abandon such a government would do well to consider in deference to what principle it is that he does it – what better he is likely to get in its stead – whether the substitution will give, or be intended to give, so much of good to the people. There are some foreshadowings on this subject. Our adversaries have adopted some Declarations of Independence in which, unlike the good old one, penned by Jefferson, they omit the words, “all men are created equal.” Why? They have adopted a temporary national constitution, in the preamble of which, unlike our good old one, signed by Washington, they omit “We, the People,” and substitute “We, the deputies

of the sovereign and independent States." Why? Why this deliberate pressing out of view, the rights of men, and the authority of the people?

This is essentially a People's contest. On the side of the Union it is a struggle for maintaining in the world that form and substance of government whose leading objective is to elevate the condition of men – to lift artificial weights from all shoulders – to clear the paths of laudable pursuit for all – to afford all an unfettered start, and a fair chance in the race of life. Yielding to partial and temporary departures, from necessity, this is the leading object of the government for whose existence we contend.

I am most happy to believe that the plain people understand and appreciate this. It is worthy of note that while in this, the government's hour of trial, large numbers of those in the Army and Navy who have been favored with the offices, have resigned and proved false to the hand which had pampered them, not one common soldier or sailor is known to have deserted his flag.

Great honor is due to those officers who remained true, despite the example of their treacherous associates; but the greatest honor, and most important fact of all, is the unanimous firmness of the common soldiers and common sailors. To the last man, so far as known, they have successfully resisted the traitorous efforts of those whose commands, but an hour before, they obeyed as absolute law. This is the patriotic instinct of the plain people. They understand, without an argument, that the destroying of the government that was made by Washington means no good to them.

Our popular government has often been called an experiment. Two points in it our people have already settled – the successful *establishing* and the successful *administering* of it. One still remains – its successful *maintenance* against a formidable internal attempt to overthrow it. It is now for them to demonstrate to the

world that those who can fairly carry on an election can also suppress a rebellion; that ballots are the rightful and peaceful successors of bullets; and that when ballots have fairly and constitutionally decided, there can be no successful appeal back to bullets; that there can be no successful appeal, except to ballots themselves, at succeeding elections. Such will be a great lesson of peace; teaching men that what they cannot take by an election, neither can they take it by war; teaching all the folly of being the beginners of a war.

Thaddeus Stevens

(1862)

"The Mainstay of the War"

Thaddeus Stevens (1792-1868) was born in Vermont, educated in Dartmouth, taught school briefly, was a lawyer, and lived most of his adult life in the towns of Lancaster and Gettysburg in Pennsylvania. He was a champion of free, public education, a life-long foe of segregation and an effective battler for the abolition of slavery. For eight years he served in the Pennsylvania State legislature, and then in Congress (1849-53 and 1859-68). He was an iron manufacturer, and a founder of the Republican Party. During the Civil War, Stevens was Chairman of the powerful House Committee on Ways and Means; with Charles Sumner of Massachusetts in the Senate, he led the Radical wing of the Republican Party.

His principled devotion to egalitarianism, his passionate leadership in the struggle against Negro slavery, and his effort to make emancipation real by policy rather than by document - a radical land reform program in the post-war South was the action he proposed - aroused against him the fierce hatred while he lived, and intense denunciation after his death. On January 22 1862, Stevens delivered in the House an acute analysis of the Civil War and the central position of the Negro people in it. Excerpts from this speech follow.

Those who suppose that the [Confederate] leaders were actuated by a desire to redress grievances, either real or fancied, mistake the real object of the traitors. They have rebelled . . . to establish a slave oligarchy which would repudiate the odious doctrine of the Declaration of Independence, and justify the establishment of an empire admitting the principle of king, lords, and slaves . . .

So long as the reins of Government could be held by Southern hands, and the influence of the administration be given to perpetuate and extend human bondage, they deemed it prudent to remain in the Union, receive its benefits, and hold its offices. But they saw that the regular march of civilization, wealth, and population was fast wresting power from the South and giving it to the North. They diligently prepared themselves for rebellion against the Constitution when they could no longer rule under it . . .

Although the Black man never lifts a weapon, he is really the mainstay of the war . . . Prejudice may be shocked, weak nerves may tremble, but they must hear and adopt it. Those who now furnish the means of war, but who are the natural enemies of slaveholders, must be made our allies. Universal emancipation must be proclaimed to all . . .

The sympathizer with treason would raise an outcry about the horrors of servile insurrection . . . Which is more to be abhorred, a rebellion of slaves fighting for their liberty, or a rebellion of freemen fighting to murder the nation? . . . What sickly loyalty and inconsistency is that which would allow lawless insurgents to murder a hundred thousand freemen, rather than liberate an oppressed people to prevent it? . . .

We have put a sword into one hand of our generals and shackles into the other. Freemen are not inspired by such mingled music. Let the people know that this Government is fighting not only to enforce a sacred compact, but to carry out to final perfection the prin-

ciples of the Declaration of Independence... and the blood of every freeman would boil with enthusiasm, and his nerves be strengthened in this holy warfare. Give him the sword in one hand, and the book of freedom in the other, and he will soon sweep despotism and rebellion from every corner of this continent...

The occasion is forced upon us, and the invitation presented to strike the chains from four millions of human beings, and create them *men*; to extinguish slavery on this whole continent.

"The Battle Hymn of the Republic"

(1862)

Julia Ward Howe (1819-1910) - wife of Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe - was born in New York City and privately educated. She was an active comrade to her husband in all his revolutionary and scientific endeavors. She was well-known as a fighter for Negro freedom, for women's rights and for the elimination of war. She was famous as a poet, biographer and essayist. While visiting Washington, in December 1861, she witnessed the tramping off to battle of Union troops, singing John Brown's Body as they went. The episode and the intense drama of the time and place deeply moved her. At one sitting, in passionate inspiration, she wrote her magnificent Battle Hymn. It was published in 1862 in The Atlantic Monthly. It swept the nation and has remained one of the best-known of all poems created by an American.

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the
Lord:

He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of
wrath are stored;

He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible
swift sword;

His truth is marching on.

I have seen Him in the watch fires of a hundred
circling camps;
They have builded Him an altar in the evening dew
and damps;
I can read His righteous sentence by the dim and
flaring lamps;
His day is marching on.

I have read a fiery gospel, writ in burnished rows
of steel:
"As ye deal with my contemners, so with you my grace
shall deal,
Let the Hero, born of woman, crush the serpent with his
heel,
Since God is marching on."

He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never
call retreat;
He is sifting out the hearts of men before His
judgment seat:
Oh! be swift my soul, to answer Him! Be jubilant my
feet!
Our God is marching on.

In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,
With a glory in His bosom that transfigures you and me:
As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free,
While God is marching on.

The Greeley – Lincoln Exchange (1862)

*Lincoln, as a President elected with less than half the total votes
and as the leader of a new Party representing a coalition of many
diverse classes and groups, would have had extreme difficulty in
administering the nation's affairs under normal conditions. As the*

Chief Executive of a nation torn by Civil War, as President of half the nation with that half itself sorely torn, Lincoln pursued a policy of the most extreme caution.

He tended to make a move only when he was certain that most of the split nation would support him. As a result, Lincoln was attacked with more than usual vehemence not only by traitors and the extreme Right, but also by much of the Left and Radical Abolitionist wing of the population. The attacks of the latter, unlike those of the former, had as their goal the furtherance of the war's successful conclusion, the destruction of slavery and the preservation of a united Republic.

These circumstances and pressures help explain the Open Letter, called "The Prayer of Twenty Millions," which Horace Greeley, Editor of the New York Tribune – the most widely circulated newspaper then in the United States and the most influential Republican paper of the day – addressed to President Lincoln on August 19 1862. They explain, too, the masterly reply which Lincoln made to Greeley three days later. It was characteristic of Lincoln that while he made the reply he did to Greeley, he had already written the Preliminary Proclamation of Emancipation, that he was to issue one month later.

Greeley's Open Letter to the President

Dear Sir: I do not intrude to tell you – for you must know already – that a great proportion of those who triumphed in your election, and of all who desire the unqualified suppression of the rebellion now desolating our country, are sorely disappointed and deeply pained by the policy you seem to be pursuing with regard to the slaves of rebels . . .

I. We require of you, as the first servant of the Republic, charged especially and preeminently with this duty, that you EXECUTE THE LAWS . . .

II. We think you are strangely and disastrously remiss in the discharge of your official and imperative duty with

regard to the emancipating provisions of the new Confiscation Act. Those provisions were designed to fight Slavery with Liberty...

III. We think you are unduly influenced by the councils, the representations, the menaces, of certain fossil politicians hailing from the Border Slave States...

IV. We think timid counsels in such a crisis calculated to prove perilous, and probably disastrous. It is the duty of a Government so wantonly, wickedly assailed by rebellion as ours has been, to oppose force to force in a defiant, dauntless spirit. It cannot afford to temporize with traitors, nor with semi-traitors...

V. We complain that the Union cause has suffered, and is now suffering immensely, from mistaken deference to rebel Slavery...

VI. We complain that the Confiscation Act which you approved is habitually disregarded by your Generals, and that no word of rebuke for them from you has yet reached the public ear...

VIII. On the face of this wide earth, Mr. President, there is not one disinterested, determined, intelligent champion of the Union cause who does not feel that all attempts to put down the rebellion and at the same time uphold its inciting cause are preposterous and futile... that every hour of deference to Slavery is an hour of added and deepened peril to the Union. I appeal to the testimony of your ambassadors in Europe...

IX. I close as I began with the statement that what an immense majority of the loyal millions of your countrymen require of you is a frank, declared, unqualified, ungrudging execution of the laws of the land, more especially of the Confiscation Act. That act gives freedom to slaves of rebels coming within our lines, or

whom those lines may at any time enclose – we ask you to render it due obedience by publicly requiring all your subordinates to recognize and obey it . . . I entreat you to render a hearty and unequivocal obedience to the law of the land.

PRESIDENT LINCOLN'S REPLY

Dear Sir: I have just read yours of the nineteenth, addressed to myself through the *New York Tribune*. If there be in it any statements or assumptions of fact which I may know to be erroneous, I do not now and here controvert them. If there be in it any inferences which I may believe to be falsely drawn, I do not now and here argue against them. If there be perceptible in it an impatient and dictatorial tone, I waive it in deference to an old friend, whose heart I have always supposed to be right.

As to the policy I “seem to be pursuing,” as you say, I have not meant to leave any one in doubt.

I would save the Union. I would save it the shortest way under the Constitution. The sooner the National authority can be restored, the nearer the Union will be “the Union as it was.” If there be those who would not save the Union unless they could at the same time *save* Slavery, I do not agree with them. If there be those who would not save the Union unless they could at the same time *destroy* Slavery, I do not agree with them. My paramount object in this struggle *is* to save the Union and *is not* either to save or destroy Slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing *any* slave, I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing *all* the slaves, I would do it; and if I could do it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would also do that. What I do about Slavery and the colored race, I do because I believe it helps to save this Union; and what I forbear, I forbear because I do *not* believe it would help to save the Union. I shall do

less whenever I shall believe what I am doing hurts the cause, and I shall do *more* whenever I shall believe doing more will help the cause. I shall try to correct errors when shown to be errors; and I shall adopt new views so fast as they shall appear to be true views. I have here stated my purpose according to my view of *official* duty, and I intend no modification of my oft expressed *personal* wish that all men, everywhere, could be free.

The Emancipation Proclamation (1863)

The pressure of the Left, and that of the Negro people themselves, considerations of diplomacy, the need to withdraw the labor power of the Negro masses from the assets of the Confederacy, worked together with other factors to demonstrate a salient truth: The integrity of the Republic required the emancipation of the slaves. And the achievement of emancipation required the victory of the Republic. This resulted in President Lincoln's issuance of a Preliminary Proclamation of Emancipation in September 1862. This Preliminary document in effect gave the Confederate masters three months notice that if they persisted in their counterrevolutionary effort, the U.S. Government would announce, as a military measure, the emancipation of all slaves then within territory still held by Confederate forces. The period of grace elapsed, the Confederate leaders did not yield. At the appointed time, dawn of January 1 1863, President Lincoln issued the final Emancipation Proclamation.

Whereas on the 22nd day of September, A. D. 1862, a proclamation was issued by the President of the United States, containing, among other things, the following, to wit:

That on the 1st day of January, 1863, all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free; and the executive government of the United States, including the military and naval authority thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of such persons and will do no act or acts to repress such persons, or any of them, in any efforts they may make for their actual freedom.

That the executive will on the 1st day of January aforesaid, by proclamation, designate the States and parts of States, if any, in which the people thereof, respectively, shall then be in rebellion against the United States; and the fact that any State or the people thereof shall on that day be in good faith represented in the Congress of the United States by members chosen thereto at elections wherein a majority of the qualified voters of such States shall have participated, shall, in the absence of strong countervailing testimony, be deemed conclusive evidence that such State and the people thereof are not then in rebellion against the United States.

Now, therefore, I, Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States, by virtue of the power in me vested as Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy of the United States in time of actual armed rebellion against the authority and government of the United States, and as a fit and necessary war measure for suppressing said rebellion, do, on this 1st day of January, A. D. 1863, and in accordance with my purpose so to do, publicly proclaimed for the full period of one hundred days from the first day mentioned above, order and designate as the States and parts of States wherein the people thereof, respectively, are this day in rebellion against the United

States the following, to wit: [there then follows a precise geographical delimitation of the stated areas].

And by virtue of the power and for the purpose aforesaid, I do order and declare that all persons held as slaves within said designated States and parts of States are, and henceforward shall be, free; and that the Executive Government of the United States, including the military and naval authorities thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of said persons.

And I hereby enjoin upon the people so declared to be free to abstain from violence, unless in necessary self-defense; I recommend to them that, in all cases when allowed, they labor faithfully for reasonable wages.

And I further declare and make known that such persons of suitable condition will be received into the armed service of the United States to garrison forts, positions, stations, and other places, and to man vessels of all sorts in said service.

And upon this act, sincerely believed to be an act of justice, warranted by the Constitution upon military necessity, I invoke the considerate judgment of mankind and the gracious favor of Almighty God.

Frederick Douglass

(1863)

"Men of Color, To Arms!"

With the Federal government committed to a policy of emancipation and of permitting Negroes to enlist in the Army, Negro leaders played a decisive role in winning enlistments to the Union cause. The great Frederick Douglass was in the forefront of this

effort; his editorial, published in his Rochester newspaper on March 2 1863 (printed below) is indicative of his passion and his theme. Republished throughout the North, the editorial had great influence upon the entire country. It is worth noting that Douglass's two sons themselves enlisted and fought in the War.

When first the rebel cannon shattered the walls of Sumter and drove away its starving garrison, I predicted that the war then and there inaugurated would not be fought out entirely by white men. Every month's experience during these weary war years has confirmed that opinion. A war undertaken and brazenly carried on for the perpetual enslavement of colored men, calls logically and loudly for colored men to help suppress it. Only a moderate share of sagacity was needed to see that the arm of the slave was the best defense against the arm of the slaveholder. Hence with every reverse to the national arms, with every exulting shout of victory raised by the slaveholding rebels, I have implored the imperiled nation to unchain against her foes, her powerful Black hand.

Slowly and reluctantly that appeal is beginning to be heeded. Stop not now to complain that it was not heeded sooner. That it should not, may or may not have been best. This is not the time to discuss that question. Leave it to the future. When the war is over, the country is saved, peace is established, and the Black man's rights are secured, as they will be, history with an impartial hand will dispose of that and sundry other questions. Action! Action! not criticism, is the plain duty of this hour. Words are now useful only as they stimulate to blows. The office of speech now is only to point out when, where, and how to strike to the best advantage.

There is no time to delay. The tide is at its flood that leads on to fortune. From east to west, from north to south, the sky is written all over, "Now or Never." "Liberty won by white men would lose half its lustre."

"Who would be free themselves must strike the blow."
"Better even die free, than to live slaves." This is the sentiment of every brave colored man among us.

There are weak and cowardly men in all nations. We have them amongst us. They tell you this is the "white man's war"; that you will be no "better off after than before the war"; that the getting of you into the army is to "sacrifice you on the first opportunity." Believe them not; cowards themselves, they do not wish to have their cowardice shamed by your brave example. Leave them to their timidity, or to whatever motive may hold them back.

I have not thought lightly of the words I am now addressing you. The counsel I give comes of close observation of the great struggle now in progress, and of the deep conviction that this is your hour and mine. In good earnest then, and after the best deliberation, I now for the first time during this war feel at liberty to call and counsel you to arms.

By every consideration which binds you to your enslaved fellow countrymen, and the peace and welfare of your country; by every aspiration which you cherish for the freedom and equality of yourselves and your children; by all the ties of blood and identity which makes us one with the Black men now fighting our battles in Louisiana and in South Carolina, I urge you to fly to arms, and smite with death the power that would bury the government and your liberty in the same hopeless grave. . . .

More than twenty years of unswerving devotion to our common cause may give me some humble claim to be trusted at this momentous crisis. I will not argue. To do so implies hesitation and doubt, and you do not hesitate. You do not doubt. The day dawns; the morning star is bright upon the horizon! The iron gate of our prison stands half open. One gallant rush from the North will fling it wide open, while four millions of our brothers and

sisters shall march out to liberty. The chance is now given you to end in a day the bondage of centuries, and to rise in one bound from social degradation to the plane of common equality with all other varieties of men.

Remember Denmark Vesey of Charleston; remember Nathaniel Turner of Southampton; Shields Green and Copeland, who followed noble John Brown, and fell as glorious martyrs for the cause of the slave. Remember that in a contest with oppression, the Almighty has no attribute which can take sides with the oppressor.

The case is before you. This is our golden opportunity. Let us accept it, and forever wipe out the dark reproaches unsparingly hurled against us by our enemies. Let us win for ourselves the gratitude of our country, and the best blessings of our posterity through all time. The nucleus of this first regiment is now in camp at Readville, a short distance from Boston. I will undertake to forward to Boston all persons adjudged fit to be mustered into the regiment, who shall apply to me at any time within the next two weeks.

Isidor Bush

(1863)

"Pity Yourselves, Not the Negro"

The Border States were crucial to the defense of the Union. Within them opposition to slavery always had been pronounced and widespread. Even more pronounced was opposition to the domination by slave-owners of the politics and the economy of the region — secession had made it possible for this opposition to achieve significant successes. Maryland, Delaware, Kentucky and Missouri were held to the Union; Tennessee was split in half, with the mountainous eastern portion firm for the North; Virginia was also split in two and the State of West Virginia was created in 1863.

A leader in the struggle to keep Missouri in the Union was a

Jewish editor, Isidor Bush (1822-1890). Bush was born in Prague. He was a partisan of the 1848 Revolution. Upon its defeat, he and his family came to New York. There Bush established the first Jewish weekly paper in the United States. In 1849, he moved to St. Louis. His position from his first to last day in the United States was consistently anti-slavery.

In the Civil War, Bush served as a Captain, and continued as a leader of the Left in State politics. Missouri was the first slave state to abolish slavery by law - this was in January 1865 when, it is true, the Negro slaves had all but freed themselves by mass flight. In several State conventions during the War, Bush pressed for immediate emancipation. In an 1863 Convention, the majority voted to postpone emancipation until 1876. Bush delivered a powerful address calling for action without delay. In the excerpts from this speech which follow, Bush stresses his denunciation of the racist stereotypes directed against the Negro.*

Mr. President, I have listened for days to the gentlemen speaking on the subject of emancipation, and I now bespeak their attention for a few minutes.

The one said "slavery" and the other "anti-slavery" is the cause of this war. I say it is part of that everlasting war between Ormuzd and Ariman, between light and darkness, between right and wrong; it is that irrepressible conflict between free labor and slave labor. The South wanted to put down abolitionism with fire and sword, establishing and extending a great empire of slave aristocracy. The North will now, and must in self-defense, put down slavery.

It matters not whether the President of the United States, much less whether you or I, have any such desire and intention or not; it is the inevitable logic, the necessary consequence of events, stronger than the will of the President, the decrees of courts, or the acts of Congress.

* Source: Morris U. Schappes, ed., *Documentary History of the Jews in the United States* (N. Y., 1951), pp. 477, 480-81.

The people of this State have to take a stand on one side or the other. To place ourselves on the middle ground between the contending parties is to be destroyed by both fires.

When they decided to stay in the Union, to fight with the North in this struggle to maintain our national existence, this question was virtually decided. You had only to draft the deed and to acknowledge it. You ought to have declared simply that we will *cheerfully* sacrifice the institution of slavery, whose value *has already been destroyed, by this rebellion*, to our country, and the people would execute the deed; thus showing to the South, as well as to the North, on which side Missouri will forever stand. The great majority of the people are in favor of emancipation. Most of those even who were opposed to it, a short time ago, acknowledge that we cannot avoid it even if we would; that emancipation is an unavoidable necessity of this war. I might say, in the Lincolnian style, that "as we cannot remove anti-slavery, we must remove slavery." *Still you hesitate. . . .*

Mr. President, I desire to notice but one point more before I close. Some of the gentlemen, members of this Convention, have drawn so horrible a picture of the evils resulting from emancipating the Negroes and leaving them afterwards free among us, that they and their misguided hearers inevitably come to the conclusion that emancipation without deportation would ruin this State. They tell us that the Negroes would be but one great band of idlers and vagabonds, robbers, murderers, and thieves. If this be true, I ask these gentlemen, "Are these the boasted blessings of Christianity, which you, the advocates of slavery, have ever and always claimed to have given to these poor Africans, in return for their freedom?"

But it is not true, and you cannot help knowing it to be false. Look at Delaware – I do not ask you to go for information to Jamaica, or the other West India Islands – look at Delaware, I say. The census of 1860, now before

you on your tables, will show you that 19 829 free Negroes live in that little State of our Union – a State not larger than three of our counties; and you pretend to say that Missouri, thirty-two times as large as Delaware, would be ruined by a comparatively small number of her Negro population, if free! New Jersey has 25 318 free Negroes, on an area only one eighth that of Missouri; and where is the murder, the rapine, and other crimes, committed by that class? Three cases of murder, and two of homicide, are all that occurred in New Jersey in 1860, against twenty-one cases of murder, and twenty-six of homicide, during the same period in Missouri.

I have no words for such slanders against poor human beings, so much sinned against. It is not enough that you hold them in bondage, toys of your whim and your lust, but you must charge them with crimes they never committed and never dreamt of. I pray you have pity for yourselves, *not* for the Negro. Slavery demoralizes, slavery fanaticism blinds you; it has arrayed brother against brother, son against father; it has destroyed God's noblest work – a free and happy people.

The Gettysburg Address

(1863)

The most famous speech delivered by an American was the immortal prose poem that came from Abraham Lincoln's lips on November 19 1863, as he dedicated the national cemetery in the little Pennsylvania town, where, in a battle during June and July 1863, the turning point of the War came in defeat for the Confederate troops.

The essence of the revolutionary and democratic nature of the Civil War was stated here in classical form.

Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and

dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate – we cannot consecrate – we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us, the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us – that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to the cause for which they gave their last full measure of devotion; that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom; and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

Abraham Lincoln

(1863–1864)

Defending the Emancipation Proclamation

So tenacious were the interests of slavery and so pernicious was the poison of racism, that Lincoln was plagued throughout his presidency by varying degrees of sympathy for the Confederacy and hatred of the Negro. Thus, the Emancipation Proclamation

itself was attacked bitterly by considerable segments of Northern opinion. For many months after its issuance, Lincoln carried on a defense of the wisdom of the policy symbolized by his Proclamation. Two letters that Lincoln wrote in this connection are especially revealing of the course of the war, the decisive role of the Negro people in winning it, saving the Union and liberating themselves.

The first letter, dated August 26 1863, was addressed to James C. Conkling, a leading citizen of Lincoln's hometown, Springfield, Illinois. Conkling had invited the President to speak at a mass meeting of loyal Union men. Lincoln's urgent duties in Washington made it impossible for him to go personally, but he sent a long letter to be read on that occasion. The letter was reprinted in papers throughout the country and indeed, in many European cities. It follows, below, slightly abridged. The second letter, dated April 4 1864, was addressed to Albert G. Hodges, editor of an important newspaper in Kentucky – the Frankfort Commonwealth. Mr. Hodges, Governor of Kentucky, and a former U.S. Senator from Kentucky had visited the President on March 26 1864 to discuss Border State problems, particularly in connection with slavery and the Negro people. Mr. Hodges later asked the President to put in writing the substance of what he said at this meeting; the President did so, and the full text of his remarks, as recorded by Lincoln himself, also is printed below.

I August 26 1863

There are those who are dissatisfied with me. To such I would say: You desire peace, and you blame me that we do not have it. But how can we attain it? There are but three conceivable ways: First, to suppress the rebellion by force of arms. This I am trying to do. Are you for it? If you are, so far we are agreed. If you are not for it, a second way is to give up the Union. I am against this. Are you for it? If you are, you should say so plainly. If you are not for force, nor yet for dissolution, there only remains some imaginable compromise. I do not believe any compromise embracing the maintenance of the Union is now possible. . . .

But to be plain. You are dissatisfied with me about the Negro. Quite likely there is a difference of opinion between you and myself upon that subject. I certainly wish that all men could be free, while I suppose you do not. Yet, I have neither adopted nor proposed any measure which is not consistent with even your view, provided you are for the Union. I suggested compensated emancipation, to which you replied you wished not to be taxed to buy Negroes. But I had not asked you to be taxed to buy Negroes, except in such way as to save you from greater taxation to save the Union exclusively by other means.

You dislike the Emancipation Proclamation, and perhaps would have it retracted. You say it is unconstitutional. I think differently. I think the Constitution invests its Commander in Chief with the law of war in time of war. The most that can be said – if so much – is that slaves are property. Is there – has there ever been – any question that by the law of war, property, both of enemies and friends, may be taken when needed? And is it not needed whenever taking it helps us, or hurts the enemy? Armies, the world over, destroy enemies' property when they cannot use it; and even destroy their own to keep it from the enemy. Civilized belligerents do all in their power to help themselves or hurt the enemy, except a few things regarded as barbarous or cruel. Exceptions are the massacre of vanquished foes and noncombatants, male and female.

But the proclamation, as law, either is valid or is not valid. If it is not valid, it needs no retraction. If it is valid, it cannot be retracted any more than the dead can be brought to life. Some of you profess to think its retraction would operate favorably for the Union. Why better after the retraction than before the issue? There was more than a year and a half of trial to suppress the rebellion before the proclamation issued; the last hundred days of which passed under an explicit notice that it

was coming, unless averted by those in revolt returning to their allegiance. The war has certainly progressed as favorably for us since the issue of the proclamation as before.

I know, as fully as one can know the opinions of others, that some of the commanders of our armies in the field, who have given us our most important successes, believe the emancipation policy and the use of the colored troops constitute the heaviest blow yet dealt to the rebellion . . . Among the commanders holding these views are some who have never had any affinity with what is called Abolitionism, or with Republican party politics, but who hold them purely as military opinions . . .

You say you will not fight to free Negroes. Some of them seem willing to fight for you; but no matter. Fight you, then, exclusively, to save the Union. I issued the proclamation on purpose to aid you in saving the Union. Whenever you shall have conquered all resistance to the Union, if I shall urge you to continue fighting, it will be an apt time then for you to declare you will not fight to free Negroes.

I thought that in your struggle for the Union, to whatever extent the Negroes should cease helping the enemy, to that extent it weakened the enemy in his resistance to you. Do you think differently? I thought that whatever Negroes can be got to do as soldiers, leaves just so much less for white soldiers to do in saving the Union. Does it appear otherwise to you? But Negroes, like other people, act upon motives. Why should they do anything for us if we will do nothing for them? If they stake their lives for us they must be prompted by the strongest motive, even the promise of freedom. The promise being made, it must be kept.

II April 4 1864

I am naturally anti-slavery. If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong. I cannot remember when I did not so think and feel. And yet I have never understood that the Presidency conferred on me an unrestricted right to act officially upon this judgment and feeling.

It was in the oath I took that I would, to the best of my ability, preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States. I could not take the office without taking the oath. Nor was it my view that I might take an oath to get power, and break the oath in using that power.

I understood, too, that in ordinary civil administration this oath even forbade me to practically indulge my primary abstract judgment on the moral question of slavery . . . I did understand, however, that my oath to preserve the Constitution to the best of my ability imposed upon me the duty of preserving, by every indispensable means, that government – that nation, of which that Constitution was the organic law. Was it possible to lose the nation and yet preserve the Constitution? By general law, life *and* limb must be protected, yet often a limb must be amputated to save a life; but a life is never wisely given to save a limb.

I felt that measures otherwise unconstitutional might become lawful by becoming indispensable to the preservation of the Constitution through the preservation of the nation. Right or wrong, I assumed this ground, and now avow it. I could not feel that, to the best of my ability, I had even tried to preserve the Constitution, if, to save slavery or any minor matter, I should permit the wreck of government, country, and Constitution all together.

When, early in the war, General [John C.] Frémont attempted military emancipation, I forbade it, because I did not then think it an indispensable necessity. When,

a little later, General [Simon W.] Cameron, then Secretary of War, suggested the arming of the Blacks, I objected because I did not yet think it an indispensable necessity. When, still later, General [David B.] Hunter attempted military emancipation, I again forbade it, because I did not yet think the indispensable necessity had come.

When in March and May and July, 1862, I made earnest and successive appeals to the border States to favor compensated emancipation, I believed the indispensable necessity for military emancipation and arming the Blacks would come unless averted by that measure. They declined the proposition, and I was, in my best judgment, driven to the alternative of either surrendering the Union, and with it the Constitution, or of laying strong hand upon the colored element. I chose the latter.

In choosing it, I hoped for greater gain than loss: but of this, I was not entirely confident. More than a year of trial now shows no loss by it in our foreign relations, none in our home popular sentiment, none in our white military force – no loss by it anyhow or anywhere.

On the contrary, it shows a gain of quite one hundred and thirty thousand soldiers, seamen, and laborers.* These are palpable facts, about which, as facts, there can be no caviling. We have the men; and we could not have had them without the measure.

And now let any Union man who complains of the measure test himself by writing down in one line that he is for subduing the rebellion by force of arms; and in the next, that he is for taking these hundred and thirty thousand men from the Union side, and placing them where they would be but for the measure he condemns.

* This is a great underestimation of the actual total of Negroes participating directly in the Union effort in the Army, Navy and as laborers for both. About 180 000 Negroes served as soldiers; 25 000 as navy personnel; and about 250 000 as workers for all the armed forces.

If he cannot face his case so stated, it is only because he cannot face the truth.

I add a word which was not in the verbal conversation. In telling this tale I attempt no compliment to my own sagacity. I claim not to have controlled events, but profess plainly that events have controlled me. Now, at the end of three years' struggle, the nation's condition is not what either party, or any man, devised or expected. God alone can claim it. Whither it is tending seems plain. If God now wills the removal of a great wrong, and wills that we of the North, as well as you of the South, shall pay fairly for our complicity in that wrong, impartial history will find therein new cause to attest and revere the justice and goodness of God.

Negro Soldiers Demand "Are We Soldiers?"

(1863)

It took heart-breaking agitation by the Negro masses and their allies - and additional considerations - to move the United States Government into permitting Negroes to enlist in its army. After that point was reached, much remained to be done to equalize the treatment accorded Negro soldiers with that given white soldiers. In every respect, Negroes were mistreated: Their arms were poor; their officers (white) generally inferior; their duties most onerous or most hazardous; even their pay, in the first months of their service, was much less than that given white troops. Organized protests from Negroes and the whole anti-slavery movement against these outrages were common, and some improvement resulted. An example of the protest is published below. It is a letter written by twenty-six-year old Corporal James Henry Gooding - formerly a seaman of New Bedford, Massachusetts - to President Lincoln, on September 28 1863, from Morris Island, South Carolina, where his regiment - the gallant 54th Massachusetts Infantry - was in combat. Further explanations appear in the letter and notes accompanying it.

Your Excellency, Abraham Lincoln:

Your Excellency will pardon the presumption of an humble individual like myself, in addressing you, but the earnest solicitation of my comrades in arms besides the genuine interest felt by myself in the matter is my excuse, for placing before the Executive head of the Nation our Common Grievance.

On the 6th of the last Month, the Paymaster of the Department informed us, that if we would decide to receive the sum of \$ 10 (ten dollars) per month, he would come and pay us that sum, but that, on the sitting of Congress, the Regiment would, in his opinion, be allowed the other 3 (three).^{*} He did not give us any guarantee that this would be, as he hoped; certainly he had no authority for making such guarantee, and we cannot suppose him acting in any way interested.

Now the main question is, are we Soldiers, or are we Laborers? We are fully armed, and equipped, have done all the various duties pertaining to a Soldier's life, have conducted ourselves to the complete satisfaction of General Officers, who were, if anything, prejudiced against us, but who now accord us all the encouragement and honors due us; have shared the perils and labor of reducing the first stronghold that flaunted a Traitor Flag [Fort Wagner, S.C.]; and more, Mr. President, today the Anglo-Saxon Mother, Wife, or Sister are not alone in tears for departed Sons, Husbands and Brothers. The patient, trusting descendants of Afric's clime have dyed

^{*} In July 1863, the War Department ruled that all Negro troops were to be classed, in pay, with hired fugitive slaves (the so-called "contrabands") and were to receive ten dollars per month - with three dollars deducted for clothing - rather than the thirteen dollars paid white troops. As an additional insult, this ruling was interpreted to mean that all Negro troops, regardless of rank, were to receive the same pay. In protest, the men of the 54th Mass. fought for eighteen months without accepting any pay whatsoever!

the ground with blood, in defense of the Union, and Democracy. Men, your Excellency, who know the cruelties of the iron heel of oppression, which in years gone by, the very power their blood is now being spilled to maintain, ever ground them in the dust.

But when the war trumpet sounded o'er the land, when men knew not the Friend from the Traitor, the Black man laid his life at the altar of the Nation - and he was refused. When the arms of the Union were beaten, in the first year of the war, and the Executive called for more food for its ravenous maw, again the Black man begged the privilege of aiding his country in her need, again to be refused.

And now he is in the War, and how has he conducted himself. Let their dusky forms rise up, out of the mires of James Island, and give the answer. Let the rich mould around Wagner's parapets be upturned and there will be found an eloquent answer.* Obedient and patient and solid as a wall are they. All we lack is a paler hue and a better acquaintance with the alphabet.

Now your Excellency, we have done a Soldier's duty. Why can't we have a Soldier's pay? You caution the Rebel chieftain, that the United States knows no distinction in her soldiers. She insists on having all her soldiers of whatever creed or color, to be treated according to the usages of war.** Now if the United States exacts uniformity of treatment of her soldiers from the insurgents, would it not be well and consistent to set the example herself by paying all her soldiers alike?

* On July 18 1863, a frontal assault upon Fort Wagner was led by 600 men of the 54th Massachusetts; this particular attack failed, but the 54th sustained 250 casualties. In September, when the Fort did surrender, men of the 54th were given the honor of entering its works first.

** The writer has reference here to the fact that the Confederacy announced that it would not treat captured Negro Union troops as prisoners of war, but rather as escaped slaves or insurrectionists.

We of this Regiment were not enlisted under any "contraband" act. But we do not wish to be understood as rating our service of more value to the Government than the service of the ex-slave. Their service is undoubtedly worth much to the Nation, but Congress made express provision touching their case, as slaves freed by military necessity, and assuming the Government to be their temporary Guardian. Not so with us. Freemen by birth and consequently having the advantage of thinking and acting for ourselves, so far as the Laws would allow us, we do not consider ourselves fit subjects for the Contraband act.

We appeal to you, Sir, as the Executive of the Nation, to have us justly dealt with. The Regiment do pray that they be assured their service will be fairly appreciated by paying them as American Soldiers, not as menial hirelings. Black men, you may well know, are poor; three dollars per month, for a year, will supply their needy wives and little ones with fuel. If you, as Chief Magistrate of the Nation, will assure us of our whole pay, we are content. Our patriotism, our enthusiasm will have a new impetus, to exert our energy more and more to aid our Country. Not that our hearts ever flagged in devotion, spite the evident apathy displayed in our behalf, but we feel as though our Country spurned us, now we are sworn to serve her. Please give this a moment's attention.*

* Pressure of the nature of this letter finally moved Congress to equalize the pay of Negro and white soldiers. In September, 1864, by special act of Congress, the men of the 54th Mass., received \$170 000 in full payment of all their back wages since May, 1863, at the same rate as that paid white troops. Corporal James Henry Gooding, however, received none of this money. On February 20 1864, he was severely wounded at the battle of Olustee, Florida, and was made a prisoner. He died on July 19 1864, while a prisoner in the notorious camp at Andersonville, Georgia.

Negroes Demand: "The Right to Universal Freedom"

(1864)

While about 500 000 Negro men and women fought with and labored for the armed forces of the nation, Negro masses as a whole, through various and numerous organizations, in the South and in the North, brought pressure to bear upon the Government to make complete and real their freedom. A good example of this kind of activity is the petition to Congress presented in February 1864, by the Israel Lyceum, a powerful organization of the Negroes of Washington, D.C. The petition, anticipating many of the provisions of the Fourteenth Amendment, enunciates demands for rights still kept from the vast majority of the nineteen million Negro people living in the United States a century later.

To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives:
Gentlemen, Greeting: Prejudice and misinformation have, for a long series of years, been fostered with unremitting assiduity by those interested in upholding the slave system – a party whose corrupt influence has enabled them to gain possession of the public ear, and to abuse public credulity to an extent not generally appreciated in an age otherwise so marked for civilization and improvement. We can only account for the indifference of benevolence manifested towards our race – that they are supposed to be, in reality, destined only for a servile condition, entitled neither to liberty nor the legitimate pursuit of happiness. We do not think that the Almighty has poured the tide of life through our breasts, animating us with a portion of His own spirit; and at the same time struck us off the list of rational beings. Our present purpose it not to enter into a recital of slavery's horrors, but to present a just, judicious, humane and well understood claim.

Amid one of the most foul conspiracies against law and obligation known to the civilized world – a civil

war in which slavery attempts to assert her sway over liberty, momentous issues present themselves for human determination. The enemy of man is goaded on to barbarous desperation, to deal death and destruction in its every track. We live, and have a being, and feel a lively interest in all these revolutions of party, principle, prejudice and power. The Government of the United States has called on all of her subjects to rally to her support in this her hour of struggle and trial. The Executive of the nation, your Honorable bodies, respectively each, all have felt their country's call, and each held it to be right and reasonable to use every proper means in their power, or that could be brought into power, to subjugate the rebels in martial array against the Government, and to bring about a permanent peace and settlement of the distracted question – was might to rule over right, or have all men a right to personal liberty, so far as they act in keeping with law and order, and to decide that a human being has rights which another human being is bound to respect.

We, the undersigned colored citizens, then, of the United States of America, assert that we regard it to be our duty to act with all who are desirous of putting down the rebellion, "in all ways and means," and under all circumstances, for which we claim at your hands a friendly recognition, and an equal portion of justice, as is meted out to the most favored of our country's subjects. We are thankful for what we now enjoy and receive, or have received, or may receive, tendering our humble thanks to your Honors for discharging your debt of duty to us nobly; yet, notwithstanding all this, we claim your especial attention in behalf of the following prayers:

Prayer 1. That if your Honors believe one of this country's strengths exists with its enlightened citizens, of all classes, that are clearly honest, willing, and

patriotic in action, then be it, by the foregoing acknowledgment, understood that all who do thus in concert act, are entitled to all the rights, immunities and privileges accruing thereto.

Prayer 2. And be it further known, that if your Honors believe, not as a question, but as a fact, that all classes should be liable to the laws of the land, and for a violation of which all are susceptible to punishment, irrespective of color, class, or clime; then we do hold that any right, any liberty, any pursuit of happiness otherwise taken from us than for a violation of such law and order, is a gross violation of justice, a mockery upon our humanity, and a glaring impeachment of an American-born person's claim to enlightened citizenship, and a complete annihilation of all natural human rights.

Prayer 3. In conclusion, we . . . ask, in the name of our blood, sweat, suffering, and constancy to our country, the United States of America, this thirty-eighth Congress to give the UNCONDITIONAL right of the colored male citizen to the ballot box, believing, from experience, that in this is the power and virtue of a free people; that at the ballot box a man confirms his manhood; and defends, supports and preserves his country; and with his right to vote, have a voice in the weal or woe of his country; and when in the enjoyment of this right he is a strength and a help, and not until then. We ask to be clothed with this right, that we may serve our country fully.

In the name of our fathers, brothers, and sons now breathing the red flame of war on the battlefield, in defense of a common country and a common civilization, and in the name of common justice, and a common God and Father of all men, having one destiny, we must respectfully ask you to extend to us the sacred

rights and privileges of the elective franchise, in all national and local affairs. We will ask God, the Father, to watch over and guide you in the right to universal freedom, in which, and only which, we feel rests the complete glory of our national pride and renown.

Abraham Lincoln on Negro Enfranchisement

(1864)

"To Keep the Jewel of Liberty"

Abraham Lincoln was murdered just as the Civil War was ending, hence he was able to play no part in developing or implementing the policy of Reconstruction. Most American historians – viewing the attempted Radical Reconstruction as an unmitigated evil – have insisted that Lincoln's policy would have been "mild"; would not have penalized the former master class. The myth in dominant historiography has it that Andrew Johnson's policy of restoration of the Bourbon would have been Lincoln's had he lived. Of course, no man can say with full confidence what "might have been"; yet all one knows about Lincoln's views and temperament and capacity for growth leads to doubt that his policy would have been that pursued so disastrously by Johnson.

One of the pieces of evidence to the contrary, is the fact that Lincoln was planning, in the months before he died, the enfranchisement of considerable sections of the Negro population in the South. Indeed, his suggestion of this in his last public speech, delivered in April 1865, was one of the things which drove John Wilkes Booth – who heard the speech – to decide to kill Lincoln as soon as possible. More than a year before, in his letter of March 13 1864, written to Michael Habn, a leading pro-Union figure in New Orleans, Lincoln had suggested this enfranchisement.

I congratulate you on having fixed your name in history as the first-free-state Governor of Louisiana. Now you are about to have a Convention which, among other

things, will probably define the elective franchise. I barely suggest for your private consideration, whether some of the colored people may not be let in — as, for instance, the very intelligent, and especially those who have fought gallantly in our ranks. They would probably help, in some trying time to come, to keep the jewel of liberty within the family of freedom. But this is only a suggestion, not to the public, but to you alone.

William Cullen Bryant

The Election of 1864

One of the most level-headed analyses of the crucial election of 1864 was written shortly before it by William Cullen Bryant for his newspaper, the New York Evening Post. The war had lasted almost four years, the casualties had been heavy, and the feeling of hostility to the so-called "Black" Republicans, mixed as it was with venomous white chauvinism, had led to considerable misgivings about the war and the Administration's policy. Some of this was exacerbated among the masses of people by the colossal graft inevitable in a bourgeois nation conducting a war, and in the class policies of the government, which on the home front favored the rich and discriminated against the poor and the workers. Furthermore prices had advanced faster and higher than had wages during the war and millions of people were in dire need.

Attacks upon Lincoln from the Right — including clear Copperhead and treasonable elements — were common. Lincoln was also under fire from "Leftists." Still, the great majority of the people saw the justness of the war, the need to save the Republic and the blessing accruing to the end of slavery. Bryant's contemporary analysis follows.

The political jumping jacks who have constituted themselves leaders of the opposition are an unhappy set of people. They would like to go dead against the war; for

that which is nearest their hearts is to make a new political alliance with the rebellious planters, to reinstate these aristocrats in their former supremacy over the southern people, and with their help once more to establish themselves in office, and prostitute the government to the uses of the planters. But unhappy wretches, they feel that to declare for peace at any price, to favor the abasement of the nation at the feet of the rebels, squarely and openly, would be to court political ruin; therefore they straddle painfully a political fence, and endeavor to talk war and peace in the same breath. . . .

The next four years will be, probably, the most important in our history. We have been sick and we are getting well; the treatment of the national physician has been cautious; he has avoided heroic methods; he has been, perhaps, slow – but he has been very careful, conscientious, watchful, and he has carried us thus far through a terrible disease in safety. He has gained experience in these three and a half years, and is a wiser and more capable physician at this moment than ever. We are getting well; but on the upward road we shall need the most skilful treatment, the most careful watching. At this moment up come Vallandigham, Wood, Cox, Voorhees, Long, Harris – a lot of fellows who have been flinging mud at the poor patient all the time he was ill, and have been constantly foretelling his speedy decease – and these impudent fellows cry out: “Don’t keep on the humdrum old doctor; bundle him out neck and heels; allow us to recommend to you a gentleman who has invented a patent pill expressly to make you well. He who will set you on your legs in a few days. He has not had much medical experience, to be sure; he never cured anybody; but just try his patent pill. *We* will guarantee its efficacy.”

But the patient, who is *not* delirious or a natural fool, replies: “Who are you, that recommend a quack to me? Are you not the same who so bitterly cursed me all these

years, who flung mud at me, who prophesied my certain death? And do you now ask me to take a physician of your recommendation?"

"Only try his patent pill," they reiterate. "We can't tell you exactly how it will work; we can't explain to you of what drugs it is compounded; you must not ask any troublesome questions; shut your eyes and bolt it, and you will see, fast enough, what will come of it."

The policy of Mr. Lincoln is declared and known. He has now guided the ship of state for more than three years; in that time of tremendous difficulty he has perhaps made mistakes, but he has acted throughout conscientiously, honorably, and with an honest and patriotic desire to do right. He has gained wisdom by experience. Every year has seen our cause more successful; every year has seen abler generals, more skilful leaders, called to the head; every year has seen fewer errors, greater ability, greater energy, in the administration of public affairs. The timid McClellan has been superseded by Grant, the do-nothing Buell by Sherman; wherever a man has shown conspicuous merit he has been called forward; political and military rivalries have been as far as possible banished from the field and from the national councils; all have been forced either to work honestly for the good of the country, or else to give place to more patriotic men. The result is a success which has grown year after year, which has falsified every prophesy of our enemies abroad, and filled them with astonishment at the immense military power which could be developed under the faithful and admirable organization of Stanton, and the command of such great and unselfish leaders as Grant, Sherman, Thomas, Rosecrans, Farragut, and a host of others. There is every reason to believe that while Mr. Lincoln continues in power, his health and beneficial state of things will continue. The best men will be retained in command; the most effectual measures will be used against the public enemy; the most kindly and fra-

ternal spirit will be displayed towards the unfortunate people who have been the unwilling tools of the rebellious planters.

Under his careful guidance we have the assurance that the war will be conducted vigorously while an enemy remains on our territory and insults our flag; and when peace comes by that enemy's submission, we have an equal assurance that he will require no conditions that freemen may not grant; he will demand for the nation only, to use his own words, "Everything for security, but nothing for revenge."

And what are we asked to substitute for this well-defined and honorable and satisfactory policy? Nobody knows. The opposition has not yet agreed upon it. They attempted to tell the nation through their resolutions at Chicago; but they are already ashamed of those. They may presently get ashamed of their candidate's letter. Just now they are quarreling amongst themselves about its meaning. Some declare it means submission to Jeff Davis; some that it means war without the help of the Negro troops, and without conscription: war, that is to say, which shall begin by weakening the armies, and of course end in defeat. But whatever it may be found to mean, it includes subversion of all the most important measures of the present administration; it means disorganization of the war power; it means the substitution, for Grant and Sherman, of generals long since shelved as incapable, men who have small experience to teach them, and who are to be resurrected only as political favorites. It includes, by the open assertion of opposition speakers, the return to slavery of more than a hundred thousand Union soldiers who now guard our detached posts and fight the enemy. It means weakening the army, and thus necessarily prolonging the war and ensuring a disgraceful peace.

The First International – President Lincoln Exchange

(1865)

Confederate leaders had hoped that the importance of cotton to the economies of western Europe, and especially England, would lead to a favorable attitude toward the rebel State; perhaps, to active intervention on its side against the United States. The governments of Napoleon the Little and of Palmerston were in fact partial to the Confederacy; but several considerations kept them from full-scale intervention on its side. One was the feeling that without such intervention the Confederacy might emerge as victor. Another was that, even if the Confederacy were defeated, the effort would reduce the status of the United States severely and set back its challenge to British world supremacy by decades if not by generations. A third was the heavy investments in the northern areas of the United States that such intervention would jeopardize. Still another was the lucrative armaments trade conducted between the United States and important munitions firms in England. Another was the vital importance of the wheat and corn of the Northern states to the economies of England and France – an importance which challenged that of cotton. Of additional consequence – and clinching the case against intervention – was the fact that European public opinion, and especially that of the working classes, was hostile to the slave-based Confederacy and sympathetic to the United States, whose government was the most representative in the world at the time.

Marxists in the United States and in Europe were passionate partisans of the forces of Lincoln, seeing in those forces the power that would destroy Negro slavery, and recognizing, as Marx stated it classically in his Capital, that "Labor with a white skin cannot emancipate itself where labor with a black skin is branded." Hence, the First International, under the personal leadership of Karl Marx, actively propagandized and demonstrated in favor of the Union cause and countered the pro-Confederate agitation then rife in England and France.

One result was the message sent by the First International to Lincoln shortly after his November 1864 reelection to the Presidency. The letter was transmitted through the United States Embassy in London – a fact carried in the January 7 1865 newspapers of the city. Shortly thereafter, the U.S. Ambassador,

Charles Francis Adams (son and grandson of Presidents of the United States) presented to the First International the reply, dated January 31 1865. This was published in all of the London papers of February 6 1865. The letter to Lincoln was written by Marx. The interchange is published below in full.*

To Abraham Lincoln,
President of the United States of America.

Sir,

We congratulate the American people upon your reelection by a large majority. If resistance to the Slave Power was the reserved watchword of your first election, the triumphant war cry of your reelection is Death to Slavery.

From the commencement of the titanic American strife the workingmen of Europe felt instinctively that The Star-Spangled Banner carried the destiny of their class. The contest of the territories which opened the dire epopee, was it not to decide whether the virgin soil of immense tracts should be wedded to the labor of the emigrant or prostituted by the tramp of the slave driver?

When an oligarchy of 300 000 slaveholders dared to inscribe for the first time in the annals of the world "slavery" on the banner of armed revolt, when on the very spots where hardly a century ago the idea of one great democratic republic had first sprung up, whence the first Declaration of the Rights of Man was issued, and the first impulse given to the European revolution of the eighteenth century; when on those very spots counterrevolution, with systematic thoroughness, gloried

* Source: Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Civil War in the United States* (N. Y., 1937), pp. 279-83.

in rescinding "the ideas entertained at the time of the formation of the old constitution," and maintained "slavery to be a beneficent institution," indeed, the only solution of the great problem of the "relation of capital to labor," and cynically proclaimed property in man "the cornerstone of the new edifice" – then the working classes of Europe understood at once, even before the fanatic partisanship of the upper classes for the Confederate gentry had given its dismal warning, that the slaveholders' rebellion was to sound the tocsin for a general holy crusade of property against labor, and that for the men of labor, with their hopes for the future, even their past conquests were at stake in that tremendous conflict on the other side of the Atlantic. Everywhere, therefore, they bore patiently the hardships imposed upon them by the cotton crisis, opposed enthusiastically the pro-slavery intervention – importunities of their betters – and, from most parts of Europe, contributed their quota of blood to the good cause.

While the workingmen, the true political power of the North, allowed slavery to defile their own republic, while before the Negro, mastered and sold without his concurrence, they boasted it the highest prerogative of the white-skinned laborer to sell himself and choose his own master, they were unable to attain the true freedom of labor, or to support their European brethren in their struggle for emancipation; but this barrier to progress has been swept off by the red sea of civil war.

The workingmen of Europe feel sure that, as the American War of Independence initiated a new era of ascendancy for the middle class, so the American anti-slavery war will do for the working classes. They consider it an earnest of the epoch to come that it fell to the lot of Abraham Lincoln, the single-minded son of the working class, to lead the country through the matchless struggle for the rescue of an enchained race and the reconstruction of a social world.

The Presidential Reply

Legation of the United States
London, Jan. 31 1865

I am directed to inform you that the address of the Central Council of your association, which was duly transmitted through this legation to the President of the United States has been received by him.

So far as the sentiments expressed by it are personal, they are accepted by him with a sincere and anxious desire that he may be able to prove himself not unworthy of the confidence which has been recently extended to him by his fellow citizens, and by so many of the friends of humanity and progress throughout the world.

The Government of the United States has a clear consciousness that its policy neither is nor could be reactionary, but at the same time it adheres to the course which it adopted at the beginning, of abstaining everywhere from propagandism and unlawful intervention. It strives to do equal and exact justice to all states and to all men, and it relies upon the beneficial results of that effort for support at home and for respect and good will throughout the world.

Nations do not exist for themselves alone, but to promote the welfare and happiness of mankind by benevolent intercourse and example. It is in this relation that the United States regard their cause in the present conflict with slavery-maintaining insurgents as the cause of human nature, and they derive new encouragement to persevere from the testimony of the workingmen of Europe that the national attitude is favored with their enlightened approval and earnest sympathies.

Abraham Lincoln

(1865)

Second Inaugural Address

After a hard-fought election, President Lincoln pressed unrelentingly against the Confederacy on the field of battle. In the winter of 1864-65 the decisive smashing blows against the slavocracy were delivered. By the time of his second inauguration on March 4 1865, the end of the war was in sight. Lincoln devoted his Inaugural Address to the war, its lessons, its essentially anti-slavery character and to the preparatory groundwork for a Reconstruction that would be principled and lasting. Next to the Gettysburg Address - and this speech is not much longer - this Second Inaugural is the best-known of the magnificent outpourings that came from the Martyred President.

Fellow Countrymen: At this second appearing to take the oath of the presidential office, there is less occasion for an extended address than there was at the first. Then a statement, somewhat in detail, of a course to be pursued, seemed fitting and proper. Now, at the expiration of four years, during which public declarations have been constantly called forth on every point and phase of the great contest which still absorbs the attention and engrosses the energies of the nation, little that is new could be presented. The progress of our arms, upon which all else chiefly depends, is as well known to the public as to myself; and it is, I trust, reasonably satisfactory and encouraging to all. With high hope for the future, no prediction in regard to it is ventured.

On the occasion corresponding to this four years ago, all thoughts were anxiously directed to an impending civil war. All dreaded it - all sought to avert it. While the inaugural address was being delivered from this place, devoted altogether to *saving* the Union without war, insurgent agents were in the city seeking to *destroy*

it without war – seeking to dissolve the Union, and divide effects, by negotiation. Both parties deprecated war; but one of them would *make* war rather than let the nation survive; and the other would *accept* war rather than let it perish. And the war came.

One eighth of the whole population were colored slaves, not distributed generally over the Union, but localized in the southern part of it. These slaves constituted a peculiar and powerful interest. All knew that this interest was, somehow, the cause of war. To strengthen, perpetuate, and extend this interest was the object for which the insurgents would rend the Union, even by war; while the government claimed no right to do more than restrict the territorial enlargement of it.

Neither party expected for the war the magnitude or the duration, which it has already attained. Neither anticipated that the *cause* of the conflict might cease with, or even before, the conflict itself should cease. Each looked for an easier triumph, and a result less fundamental and astounding. Both read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces; but let us judge not that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered – that of neither has been answered fully.

The Almighty has His own purposes. "Woe unto the world because of offenses! for it must needs be that offenses come; but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh." If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through his appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both, North and South, this terrible war, as the woe due to those by whom the offense came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a Living God always ascribe to

Him? Fondly do we hope – fervently do we pray – that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue, until all the wealth piled up by the bondman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash, shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said, "The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."

With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan – to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations.

Lincoln Enters the Rebel Capital (1865)

With the sense of fitness that so often appears in human history, the first to break their way into Richmond, capital city of the Confederacy, were Negro troops, men of the 29th Connecticut Colored Infantry Regiment. J. J. Hill, a soldier in this Regiment, after describing the fighting of the days immediately prior to April 1 when the city was entered, goes on to describe that entry. Within thirty-six hours, Abraham Lincoln toured the capital city of the now crushed slaveholders' state, and Hill described the scene.

The 3rd instant President Lincoln visited the city. No triumphal march of a conqueror could have equaled in moral sublimity the humble manner in which he entered Richmond. I was standing on the bank of the James river viewing the scene of desolation when a boat, pulled by

twelve sailors, came up the stream. It contained President Lincoln and his son . . .

In some way the colored people on the bank of the river ascertained that the tall man wearing the black hat was President Lincoln. There was a sudden shout and clapping of hands. I was very much amused at the plight of one officer who had in charge fifty colored men to put to work on the ruined buildings; he found himself alone, for they left work and crowded to see the President. As he approached I said to a woman, "Madam, there is the man that made you free." She exclaimed, "Is that President Lincoln?" My reply was in the affirmative. She gazed at him with clasped hands and said, "Glory to God. Give Him the praise for his goodness," and she shouted till her voice failed her.

When the President landed there was no carriage near, neither did he wait for one, but leading his son, they walked over a mile to General Weitzel's headquarters at Jefferson Davis's mansion, a colored man acting as guide. Six soldiers dressed in blue, with their carbines, were the advanced guards. Next to them came President Lincoln and son, and Admiral Porter, flanked by the other officers right and left. Then came a correspondent, and in the rear were six sailors with carbines. Then followed thousands of people, colored and white. What a spectacle! I never witnessed such rejoicing in all my life.

As the President passed along the street the colored people waved their handkerchiefs, hats and bonnets, and expressed their gratitude by shouting repeatedly, "Thank God for his goodness; we have seen his salvation." The white soldiers caught the sound and swelled the numbers, cheering as they marched along.

All could see the President, he was so tall. One woman standing in a doorway as he passed along shouted, "Thank you, dear Jesus, for this sight of the great conqueror." Another one standing by her side clasped her hands and shouted, "Bless the Lamb - Bless the Lamb." Another

one threw her bonnet in the air, screaming with all her might, "Thank you, Master Lincoln." A white woman came to a window but turned away, as if it were a disgusting sight. A few white women looking out of an elegant mansion waved their handkerchiefs.

President Lincoln walked in silence, acknowledging the salute of officers and soldiers, and of the citizens, colored and white. It was a man of the people among the people. It was a great deliverer among the delivered. No wonder tears came to his eyes when he looked on the poor colored people who were once slaves, and heard the blessings uttered from thankful hearts and thanksgiving to God and Jesus. They were earnest and heartfelt expressions of gratitude to Almighty God, and thousands of colored men in Richmond would have laid down their lives for President Lincoln. After he visited Jeff Davis's mansion he proceeded to the rebel Capitol and from the steps delivered a short speech, and spoke to the colored people as follows:

"In reference to you, colored people, let me say God has made you free. Although you have been deprived of your God-given rights by your so-called masters, you are now as free as I am, and if those that claim to be your superiors do not know that you are free, take the sword and bayonet and teach them that you are — for God created all men free, giving to each the same rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

The gratitude and admiration amounting almost to worship, with which the colored people of Richmond received the President must have deeply touched his heart. He came among the poor unheralded, without pomp or pride, and walked through the street, as if he were a private citizen more than a great conqueror. He came not with bitterness in his heart, but with the olive leaf of kindness, a friend to elevate sorrow and suffering, and to rebuild what had been destroyed.

Walt Whitman

(1865)

"O Captain! My Captain!"

On April 14 1865 – just five days after Lee surrendered to Grant at Appomattox – Abraham Lincoln was shot in the head by a pro-Confederate fanatic. He died the next morning. The nation and all humanity mourned the passing of an American with an intensity not to be approached – until another April day just eighty years later when Franklin Delano Roosevelt died. Two magnificent poems flowed from Walt Whitman's broken heart as it sought to express the tragedy; one, too long for reproduction here, is the exquisite "When Lilacs Last in the Door-Yard Bloom'd"; the other, more directly passionate and anguished, follows.

O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done,
The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought
is won,
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and
daring;
But O heart! heart! heart!
O the bleeding drops of red,
Where on the deck my Captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead.

O Captain! my Captain! rise up and hear the bells;
Rise up – for you the flag is flung – for you the bugle
trills,
For you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths – for you the
shores a-crowding,
For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces
turning;
Here Captain! dear father!
This arm beneath your head!
It is some dream that on the deck,
You've fallen cold and dead.

My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still,
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will,
The ship is anchor'd safe and sound, its voyage closed
and done,

From fearful trip, the victor ship comes in with object
won;

Exult O shores, and ring O bells!

But I with mournful tread,

Walk the deck my Captain lies,

Fallen cold and dead.

Thaddeus Stevens

(1865)

"This Is Man's Government"

The coming into force in December 1865 of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution, marks the formal and legal ending of chattel slavery in the United States. From then on to the present moment the Negro American people have endured not slavery but peonage, special oppression, exploitation and second-class citizenship rights. Many of those – Negro and white – who fought against slavery knew that more than the formal abolition of chattel slavery would be needed to begin to make the freedom of the Negro masses real. They knew that racist discrimination would have to be destroyed, that economic deprivation would have to be overcome, and that full citizenship rights would have to be gained.

One of the landmarks in this battle was the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution, adopted in 1868. This is past the chronological limits of the present volume, but the groundwork for what it sought to accomplish – equality of citizenship rights for the Negro people – was insisted upon during and just after the Civil War, especially by the Radicals among the whites, and by the whole Negro leadership. A good example of the argumentation of the former comes in the following excerpt from a speech delivered in Congress by Thaddeus Stevens on December

18 1865. These words gain added importance when one realizes that Stevens deserves the title of Father of the Fourteenth Amendment as much as any single person.

The whole Copperhead party*, pandering to the lowest prejudices of the ignorant, repeat the cuckoo cry, "This is the white man's government." Demagogues of all parties, even some high in authority, gravely shout, "This is the white man's government." What is implied by this? That one race of men are to have the exclusive right forever to rule this nation, and to exercise all sovereignty, while all other races and nations and colors are to be their subjects, and have no voice in making the laws and choosing the rulers by whom they are to be governed.

Wherein does this differ from slavery except in degree? Does not this contradict all the distinctive principles of the Declaration of Independence? . . .

Our fathers repudiated the whole doctrine of the legal superiority of families or races and proclaimed the equality of man before the law . . . They were prevented by slavery from perfecting the superstructure whose foundation they had thus broadly laid . . . they consented to wait, but never relinquished the idea of its final completion . . .

It is our duty to complete their work . . . This is not a "white man's government" . . . To say so is political blasphemy, for it violates the fundamental principles of our gospel of liberty. This is man's government, the government of all men alike . . . Equal rights to all the privileges of the government is innate in every immortal being, no matter what the shape or color of the tabernacle which it inhabits.

* Copperhead was the name given to Northerners who, during the War, favored the Confederacy; the name derives from that of a poisonous snake.

William Cullen Bryant

(1866)

"The Death of Slavery"

Perhaps no more fitting conclusion for this volume may be found than "The Death of Slavery," a poem by William Cullen Bryant, published in 1866. With its evocation of the horrors of the institution, its ecstasy at the victory of the forces of freedom, and its forebodings of perhaps even sterner battles for the future, the poet distills much of the entire meaning of the great effort to abolish Negro slavery in the United States.

O thou great Wrong, that, through the slow-paced years,
Didst hold thy millions fettered, and didst wield
The scourge that drove the laborer to the field,
And turn a stony gaze on human tears,
Thy cruel reign is o'er;
Thy bondmen crouch no more
In terror at the menace of thine eye;
For He who marks the bounds of guilty power,
Long-suffering, hath heard the captive's cry,
And touched his shackles at the appointed hour,
And lo! they fall, and he whose limbs they galled
Stands in his native manhood, disenthralled.

A shout of joy from the redeemed is sent;
Ten thousand hamlets swell the hymn of thanks;
Our rivers roll exulting, and their banks
Send up hosannas to the firmament!
Fields where the bondman's toil
No more shall trench the soil,
Seem now to bask in a serener day;
The meadow-birds sing sweeter, and the airs
Of heaven with more caressing softness play,
Welcoming man to liberty like theirs.
A glory clothes the land from sea to sea,
For the great land and all its coasts are free.

Within that land wert thou enthroned of late,
And they by whom the nation's laws were made,
And they who filled its judgment-seats obeyed
Thy mandate, rigid as the will of Fate.
Fierce men at thy right hand,
With gesture of command,
Gave forth the word that none might dare gainsay;
And grave and reverend ones, who loved thee not,
Shrank from thy presence, and in blank dismay
Choked down unuttered, in rebellious thought;
While meaner cowards, mingling with thy train,
Proved, from the book of God, thy right to reign.

Great as thou wert, and feared from shore to shore,
The wrath of Heaven o'ertook thee in thy pride;
Thou sitt'st a ghastly shadow; by thy side
Thy once strong arms hang nerveless evermore.

And they who quailed but now
Before thy lowering brow,
Devote thy memory to scorn and shame,
And scoff at the pale, powerless thing thou art.
And they who ruled in thine imperial name,
Subdued, and standing sullenly apart,
Scowl at the hands that overthrew thy reign,
And shattered at a blow the prisoner's chain.

Well was thy doom deserved; thou didst not spare
Life's tenderest ties, but cruelly didst part
Husband and wife, and from the mother's heart
Didst wrest her children, deaf to shriek and prayer;
Thy inner lair became
The haunt of guilty shame;
Thy lash dropped blood; the murderer, at thy side,
Showed his red hands, nor feared the vengeance due.
Thou didst sow earth with crimes, and, far and wide,
A harvest of uncounted miseries grew,
Until the measure of thy sins at last
Was full, and then the avenging bolt was cast!

Go now, accursed of God, and take thy place
With hateful memories of the elder time,
With many a wasting plague, and nameless crime,
And bloody war that thinned the human race;
With the Black Death, whose way
Through wailing cities lay,
Worship of Moloch, tyrannies that built
The Pyramids, and cruel creeds that taught
To avenge a fancied guilt by deeper guilt –
Death at the stake to those that held them not.
Lo! the foul phantoms, silent in the gloom
Of the flown ages, part to yield thee room.

I see the better years that hasten by
Carry thee back into that shadowy past,
Where, in the dusty spaces, void and vast,
The graves of those whom thou hast murdered lie.
The slave-pen, through whose door
Thy victims pass no more,
Is there, and there shall the grim block remain
At which the slave was sold; while at thy feet
Scourges and engines of restraint and pain
Moulder and rust by thine eternal seat.
There, mid the symbols that proclaim thy crimes,
Dwell thou, a warning to the coming times.

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